

# Gaza-South Africa: Victory for worker solidarity

Wednesday 25 February 2009, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#), [Cosatu](#), [DE BOER Heinz](#), [MASUKU Bongani](#), [PSC](#) (Date first published: 6 February 2009).

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The Congress of South African Trade Union is pleased to announce that its members, dock workers belonging to the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) achieved a victory last night when they stood firm by their decision not to offload the Johanna Russ, a ship that was carrying Israeli goods to South Africa. This, despite threats to COSATU members from sections of the pro-Israeli lobby, and despite severe provocation.

The Johanna Russ, flying an Antigua flag, is owned by M. Dizengoff and Co., an established “pioneer of the modern era of shipping business in the Middle East” and shipping agent for the ironically named Zim Israel Navigation Company. (Ironic because, last year, the same SATAWU members refused to offload the Chinese ship An Yue Jiang, which was carrying arms and ammunition destined for Robert Mugabe’s army.)

The worker action last night took place despite attempted subterfuge on the part of the owners of the shipping company. There was an attempt to confound the plan by arriving earlier than originally scheduled, which was 8 February. Dates for the berthing of the Johanna Russ were changed constantly. Yesterday morning, SATAWU members were told that the ship would dock this morning (Friday) at 02:00. Thanks to the vigilance of the dock workers, SATAWU discovered that the ship had docked on Wednesday morning and was due to be offloaded last night at 21:00. But the vigilant workers were on guard and immediately they realised that it had docked, they then refused to handle it, despite pressures from management. SATAWU members maintained their refusal to offload the ship and also attempted to ensure that scab labour would not be used.

A few hours after berthing, at 23:00, the Johanna Russ sneaked out of the Durban Harbour.

From the beginning of this action, COSATU workers remained resolute about their position and were convinced that, following the recent Israeli massacres in Gaza, they will take determined action against Israel. Israel’s terror included flagrant breaches of international law, the bombing of densely populated neighbourhoods, the illegal deployment of chemical white phosphorous, and attacks on schools, ambulances, relief agencies, hospitals, universities and places of worship.

COSATU has now decided to intensify its efforts in support of the struggles of the Palestinian people. The worker victory in Durban yesterday spurs COSATU members on to more determined action in order to isolate the Apartheid state of Israel. Other Cosatu unions are currently in discussion about how they might also give effect to Cosatu resolutions on boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, including a refusal to handle Israeli goods, and continuing pressure on our government to

sever diplomatic and trade relations with Israel.

The momentum against apartheid Israel has become an irresistible force. We are proud to stand with the millions around the world who say 'Enough is enough'. They are doing what we asked them to do when we faced the apartheid regime in our own country.

COSATU and the PSC call on all people of conscience to join us in boycotting Israeli products and institutions until a just, democratic state, with equal rights for all comes into existence in Palestine. This is just the beginning of a solidarity campaign which will continue until the demands of the Palestinian people have been won.

## **6 February 2009**

Issued by Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC)

*For more information, call:*

Randall Howard (Satawu General Secretary) - 082 564 6298

Patrick Craven (Cosatu) - 082 821 7456

Melissa Hoole (PSC) - 073 906 0017

Bongani Masuku (Cosatu)- 079 499 6419

Salim Vally (PSC) - 082 802 5936

Na'eem Jeenah (PSC) - 084 574 2674

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## **COSATU humbled by inspirational messages from all over the world for our BDS campaign against Israel**

### **12 February 2009**

The South African week of action against Israeli barbarism and in support of Palestinian heroism and resistance has been an unprecedented success.

COSATU, its affiliates, particularly the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union, (SATAWU) and the rest of Palestinian solidarity movement in South Africa are humbled by the large number of letters of support we have received from trade unions, solidarity groups, workers, activists and people of conscience from all over the world for our stance in solidarity with the people of Palestine. In particular, letters congratulated SATAWU dock workers in Durban for their determined refusal to off-load goods from Israel carried on the Johanna Russ.

Messages of support included those from the Palestinian BDS (boycotts, divestment and sanctions) National Committee, dock workers in Liverpool, trade unions in Australia and Canada, and solidarity

organisations from around the world.

We note, in contrast, the vicious, racist and extremely offensive campaign waged against COSATU by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein in several of their fora and publications. We believe that this reflects the fact that our campaign to support the struggle for freedom of the Palestinian people and for the isolation of Apartheid Israel is having the desired impact of putting pressure on Israel and its apologists in South Africa.

We treat with particular contempt the comment, as reported in the media, by Goldstein that COSATU is racist and that our actions are immoral. What is immoral is the insistence by Goldstein, the SAZF and the SAJBD that they will support Israel's murderous actions in Gaza, including the massacres of civilians, the bombing of schools, places of worship, ambulances, hospitals and UN refugee centres. The real racism is manner in which Israel treats the Palestinian people – both in the Occupied Territory as well as its own citizens – as sub-human beings. The members of COSATU know what racism is; we lived with it and fought against it for decades while the SAZF and SAJBD supported the Apartheid state in South Africa, just as they uncritically support Apartheid in Israel.

We will not be cowed by the attempted intimidation of Zionists in South Africa, as evidenced on Friday when they attempted to provoke protestors in Raedene, Johannesburg, – one of them even hurling projectiles at us. We pledge to stand our ground in demanding justice and peace for our brothers and sisters in Palestine, as we do for oppressed and suffering people everywhere in the world. Already, other COSATU affiliates are seriously discussing their own strategies to act on the BDS campaign. We expect that, over the next few months, more affiliates will outline their programmes of action in support of the call 'FREE PALESTINE! ISOLATE APARTHEID ISRAEL!'

COSATU General Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, addressing a rally in Cape Town on Sunday, said: "COSATU calls on workers in the rest of the world to follow the lead of our members in SATAWU who have vowed not to unload any Israeli goods, and our members who are planning a campaign not to handle any Israeli goods in supermarkets, and other stores".

He added: "Workers of the world united to isolate the Apartheid South African state in 1970s and 1980s. Workers need to stretch our hands across the seas and our continents to join together, now, to isolate the Apartheid Israeli state and to Free Palestine."

We also note that Histadrut (Israeli trade union Federation) supports unequivocally the acts of brutality against the people of Palestine, whilst also seeking to reverse the advances of the global BDS Campaign. This is not only unfortunate, but also a serious challenge to the unity of the international trade union movement in struggle for justice.

We note that very heart-warming and humbling messages have been written by many friends of justice all over the world. We will quote from a few (see below) to illustrate the growing voices of justice that refuse to be intimidated by Zionist threats and double standards by the powerful.

### **Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU)**

Please accept our deep gratification and appreciation for all efforts you exerted to secure solidarity to our people against Israeli's violations and crimes. Please convey our thanks and appreciation to our comrades in COSATU for their courageous steps and stunning efforts to support Palestinian people and to condemn Israeli aggression on Gaza and West Bank. The activities and the actions that have been exerted show your historical tradition to face the apartheid either in south Africa or in Palestine . We learn from your experience the belief of facing the crimes of the occupation .

## **BDS National Committee (BNC) in Palestine:**

[We] warmly salute the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), a member of COSATU, for its decision today not to offload an Israeli ship that is due to arrive in Durban... Coming weeks after the massive Israeli massacre in Gaza, this distinguished expression by SATAWU of effective solidarity with the Palestinian people in general, and with Gaza in particular, sets a historic precedent that reminds us of the first such action during the apartheid era taken by Danish dock workers in 1963, when they decided not to offload ships carrying South African products, triggering a similar boycott in Sweden, England and elsewhere.

## **Northern Branch of the Independent Workers Union, Ireland**

The Northern Branch of the Independent Workers Union, Ireland sends its greetings and solidarity to the inspiring actions of South African dock workers and this stance by Cosatu and tireless work of PSC.

The protests that erupted round the world in response to Israel's onslaught in Gaza showed the anger of ordinary people at the persistent injustice faced by Palestinians. It is clear that this must be transformed into more concrete actions to change the conditions for Palestinians and the way power is abused by the wealthy in today's world. The actions by the dockers in South Africa, again, show the spirit of resistance that other trade unions would do well to follow and we salute the courage and direction marked out by your example.

## **The Campaign to End Israeli Apartheid - Southern California**

The Campaign to End Israeli Apartheid-Southern California ([www.ceia-sc.org](http://www.ceia-sc.org)) wishes to voice its enthusiastic support of the members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) in Durban for taking the lead in the struggle to defeat apartheid in the State of Israel by being the first group of workers to refuse to offload a ship coming from Israel and carrying Israeli goods.

These brave workers lived under, and struggled against, apartheid in South Africa. As such, they know firsthand the brutalities and dehumanization of the apartheid system. They also know how important international solidarity was in the struggle to defeat apartheid in South Africa.

## **Freedom Socialist Party sections in both Australia and the United States**

I'm writing... to congratulate COSATU on the stance that you have taken to support the just struggles of the Palestinian people through building a mass movement to boycott Israeli goods and demand divestment and sanctions.

South African workers, more than workers anywhere else in the world, will clearly understand and appreciate the power that an international mass movement that has the backing of organised labour can have. The leadership you are providing is inspirational and will boost efforts of unionists around the globe and help galvanise the power of organised workers everywhere to support our Palestinian sisters and brothers.

## **International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Local 10, USA**

Congratulations to COSATU, SATAWU, the dockers who stood firm on the night against all manœuvres, and everyone involved in this magnificent and historic action. I know there are other dockworkers around the world who are watching very closely, and who may be inspired to act themselves.

## **SAMWU (South African Municipal Workers Union)**

[We] salute your members for their wonderful act of solidarity by refusing to off-load the Johanna Russ with its cargo of Israeli goods. SATAWU has set the rest of the labour movement an inspiring example of what can be done.

## **LO Norway**

We have appreciated COSATU's clear and strong engagement in this issue, and your information sharing on this. LO-Norway will continue following the situation and continue our solidarity work with the Palestinian workers. LO condemns Israel's bombing and ground invasion of Gaza. Killing civilians and abusing the population cannot be justified. Israel must immediately stop its acts of war.

## **Deb Reich, Israel**

Dissidents in Israel! I want to thank you for what you do to help bring justice here. I have spent most of my adult life trying to help other Jews in Israel understand that there is a way out of the vast nightmare of injustices perpetrated here in the name of various noble ideals. The brainwashing is so thorough here that people become quite incapacitated — unable to comprehend the simple idea that, while pluralism can embrace and make space for endless varieties of particularity, all of which can thrive in happy proximity — the reverse is impossible: particularity and exclusivism cannot make space for a healthy pluralism. If you want a decent shared prosperity, you have to open up to it!

When a military giant refuses to get the message, international economic pressure such as you have brought to bear is evidently the only answer that makes sense. Let us hope the tide will turn soon and minimize the number of innocents who are forced to pay with their lives for the blindness, fear, and prejudice of their neighbours.

Permit me to say thanks again for your courageous stand. Its importance is probably even greater than we realize; one day, looking back, all will see how significant your action has been.

## **BDS National Committee in Palestine:**

Refusing to fall prey to Zionist intimidation and bullying (which have very effectively, alas, muzzled mainstream condemnation of Israeli crimes in the west for many years), the COSATU-led BDS campaign in South Africa is truly setting new precedents with unique courage, vision and the best tradition of internationalism and solidarity.

## **Bongani Masuku, International Relations Officer**

Congress of South African Trade Unions

1-5 Leyds Cnr Biccard Streets

Braamfontein, 2017

P.O. Box 1019

Johannesburg, 2000

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## **Cosatu targets Israel Dockers in Durban refuse to offload ship**

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Heinz de Boer

TRADE union giant Cosatu has vowed to close South African ports to ships bearing goods from "apartheid Israel" - starting with a refusal to offload a vessel which will be docking in Durban on Sunday.

It will be the second time Cosatu's affiliate, the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu), refuses to unload goods destined for, or from countries, the labour unions have labelled rogue states: Israel, Zimbabwe and Swaziland among them. Unions describe these countries as "dictatorial and oppressive".

Last year a Chinese ship laden with arms and ammunition bound for Zimbabwe had to turn away from Durban and other ports after Satawu refused to offload it.

In a joint statement by Cosatu, the Palestine Solidarity Committee and Young Communist League, they said: "This follows the decision by Cosatu to strengthen the campaign in South Africa for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against apartheid Israel."

They announced a series of protests starting tomorrow in Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Benoni.

Several members of parliament, senior union leaders and former intelligence minister, Ronnie Kasrils, are expected to take part at these events. Protesters are expected near the harbour on Margaret Mncadi Avenue (Victoria Embankment) on Sunday at 10am.

Cosatu said Western Australian unionists had last week also decided to refuse to handle Israeli goods in a campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

The joint statement also recalled how dock workers had successfully boycotted South African goods in the apartheid years.

"We call on other workers and unions to follow suit and to do all that is necessary to ensure that they boycott all goods to and from Israel until Palestine is free." "We also welcome statements by various South African Jews of conscience who have dissociated themselves from the genocide in Gaza," the joint statement said.

But the South African Jewish Board of Deputies yesterday told the Daily News Cosatu's concern over the ship may have more to do with impending national elections.

Elections

"Cosatu wants to show its muscle and the elections are getting closer, so it is easy to bash a foreign

state,” said board chairman, Zev Krengel. “It is a pity Cosatu cannot show the same solidarity with its own brothers in the African continent. More than 3 000 people in Zimbabwe have died of cholera, yet we do not see any protest about that.”

Krengel said boycotts would have little economic effect on Israel.

“As South Africans, we have been a nation which talks and reconciles. This is not helping at all, and does not help the Palestinians,” he said.

Cosatu spokesman, Patrick Craven, said the labour federation and its affiliates were forced into not handling Israeli goods by that country’s own actions.

He ridiculed suggestions that electioneering had anything to do with the decision not to offload the ship.

“The ultimate aim is to give the Palestinians independence and a sovereign state in which to live. This particular action goes beyond simple verbal denunciations (of Israel’s actions),” Craven said.

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## **FREE PALESTINE! ISOLATE APARTHEID ISRAEL!**

***COSATU and PSC launch Week of Action for Palestine supported by YCL and other progressive organisations***

**Media Conference, COSATU House, 3 February 2009, 11am**

In a historic development for South Africa, South African dock workers have announced their determination not to offload a ship from Israel that is scheduled to dock in Durban on Sunday, 8 February 2009. This follows the decision by COSATU to strengthen the campaign in South Africa for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Apartheid Israel.

The pledge by SATAWU members in Durban reflects the commitment by South African workers to refuse to support oppression and exploitation across the globe. Last year, Durban dock workers had refused to offload a shipment of arms that had arrived from China and was destined for Zimbabwe to prop up the Mugabe regime and to intensify the repression against the Zimbabwean people. Now, says SATAWU’s General Secretary Randall Howard, the union’s members are committing themselves to not handling Israeli goods.

SATAWU’s action on Sunday will be part of a proud history of worker resistance against apartheid. In 1963, just four years after the Anti-Apartheid Movement was formed, Danish dock workers refused to offload a ship with South African goods. When the ship docked in Sweden, Swedish workers followed suit. Dock workers in Liverpool and, later, in the San Francisco Bay Area also refused to offload South African goods. South Africans, and the South African working class in particular, will remain forever grateful to those workers who determinedly opposed apartheid and decided that they would support the anti-apartheid struggle with their actions.

Last week, Western Australian members of the Maritime Union of Australia resolved to support the campaign for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, and have called for a boycott of all

Israeli vessels and all vessels bearing goods arriving from or going to Israel.

This is the legacy and the tradition that South African dock workers have inherited, and it is a legacy they are determined to honour, by ensuring that South African ports of entry will not be used as transit points for goods bound for or emanating from certain dictatorial and oppressive states such as Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Israel.

COSATU, the Palestine Solidarity Committee, the Young Communist League and a range of other organisations salute the principled position taken by these workers. We also take this opportunity to salute the millions of workers all over the world who have openly condemned and taken decisive steps to isolate apartheid Israel, a step that should send shockwaves to its arrogant patrons in the United States who foot the bill for Israel's killing machine. We call on other workers and unions to follow suit and to do all that is necessary to ensure that they boycott all goods to and from Israel until Palestine is free.

We also welcome statements by various South African Jews of conscience who have dissociated themselves from the genocide in Gaza. We call on all South Africans to ensure that none of our family members are allowed to join the Israeli Occupation Forces' killing machine.

In celebration of the actions of SATAWU members with regard to the ship from Israel, and in pursuance of the campaign for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, and our call on the South African government to sever diplomatic and trade relations with Israel, this coalition of organisations has declared a week of action beginning on Friday, 6 February 2009. The actions will be organised under the theme: FREE PALESTINE! ISOLATE APARTHEID ISRAEL! Activities that have already been confirmed for this week will include:

- Friday, 6 February: A protest outside the offices of the South African Zionist Federation and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2 Elray Street, Raedene, off Louis Botha Avenue. Both these organisations unquestioningly supported the recent Israeli attacks against Gaza, and supported the massacre of civilians and the attacks on schools, mosques, ambulances, and UN refugee centres. Protestors will be addressed by, among others, SATAWU General Secretary Randall Howard, and ex-Minister Ronnie Kasrils. Protest starts at 14:00.
- Friday, 6 February: A picket outside parliament in Cape Town. COSATU members and solidarity activists will be joined by a number of members of parliament. Picket starts at 09:30.
- Friday, 6 February: A mass rally in Actonville, Benoni, at the Buzme Adab Hall. The rally will be addressed by, among others, COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, PSC spokesperson Salim Vally, South African Council of Churches General Secretary Eddie Makue, and ex-Minister Ronnie Kasrils. Rally starts at 19:30.
- Sunday, 8 February: A protest at the Durban Harbour Mouth, off Victoria Embankment [Margaret Mncadi Avenue]. Protestors will be addressed by, among others, COSATU President Sdumo Dlamini. Protest starts at 10:00.
- Sunday 8 February: A mass rally in Cape Town at Vygieskraal Rugby Stadium. The rally will be addressed by, among others, COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, and Allan Boesak. Rally starts at 14:30.



