

STATEMENTS

Palestine: BNC Reiterates its Position on “September”

Sunday 25 September 2011, by [BDS](#) (Date first published: 8 August 2011).

In the midst of the debate on Palestinian diplomatic initiatives aimed at securing membership of “Palestine” in the United Nations, many legitimate questions on strategies and tactics have arisen among people of conscience around the world who support freedom, justice and equality for the Palestinian people. As in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, Palestine solidarity groups and activists are convinced, as we are, that only concerted, effective, and sustained forms of solidarity, especially in the form of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS), can hold Israel accountable to its obligations under international law and lead to the realization of comprehensive Palestinian rights.

The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), the largest Palestinian civil society coalition, reiterates and further explicates below the main principles which have informed its position on this matter, as expressed in our statement issued on June 1, 2011.

(1) Self Determination

The most fundamental, inalienable right of the people of Palestine is the right to self determination. Ending the occupation is one pillar in exercising that right. The right to self-determination, which in the case of Palestinians is represented by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), is commonly defined as the right of “all peoples ... freely to determine, without external interference, their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”[1] It is a right held by all Palestinians, irrespective of their current location, by virtue of international law and the principles of popular sovereignty and democracy. All Palestinians, including the refugees in the shatat (diaspora) and Palestinian citizens of Israel, have a right to participate in and be represented by - in the UN and elsewhere - a democratic PLO that determines the political status and pursues the economic, social and cultural development of the entire Palestinian people.

At a minimum, exercising the right to self determination by all Palestinians entails:

1. Ending Israel’s occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in 1967;
2. Honoring the right of Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality by ending the Israeli system of legalized and institutionalized racial discrimination (which conforms to the UN definition of apartheid); and
3. Respecting and enabling the implementation of the UN-sanctioned right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands from which they were expelled.

(2) PLO

Until the Palestinian people exercises its right to self determination, the PLO remains the sole legitimate representative that represents all Palestinians in the UN and in other international,

regional and multinational forums. No alternative will be accepted by the great majority of the Palestinian people.

(3) Complicity and Accountability

States that have recognized the Palestinian right to statehood are even more obliged to end their complicity in maintaining, covering up or even strengthening Israel's regime of occupation, colonialism and apartheid against the Palestinian people. States that offer recognition of Palestinian statehood and continue business as usual with Israel are beyond hypocritical; they betray their own basic legal and political obligations to end Israel's grave and persistent violations of international law and Palestinian rights.

[Excerpts from a June 2011 statement issued by the BDS National Committee (BNC), the largest coalition in Palestinian civil society]

Before and After September: The Struggle for Palestinian Rights Must Intensify

This September will mark the 20th anniversary of the start of the Israeli-Palestinian "peace process" that is widely recognized as a total failure, by any objective standard. This sham process has served as a cover for Israel's intensive colonization of Palestinian lands, continued denial of Palestinian basic rights, and gradual ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, while simultaneously giving a false impression of peacemaking. In this context, the BNC welcomes the recognition of a great majority of states around the world that the Palestinian right to statehood and freedom from Israeli occupation are long overdue and should no longer be held hostage to fanatically biased US "diplomacy" in defense of Israeli expansionism. However, recognition of Palestinian statehood is clearly insufficient, on its own, in bringing about a real end to Israel's occupation and colonial rule. Neither will it end Israel's decades-old system of legalized racial discrimination, which fits the UN definition of apartheid, or allow the millions of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes of origin from which they were violently uprooted and exiled.

Diplomatic recognition must result in protection of the inalienable right to self-determination of the entire Palestinian people represented by a democratized and inclusive PLO that represents not just Palestinians under occupation, but also the exiled refugees, the majority of the Palestinian people, as well as the discriminated citizens of Israel. For it to go beyond symbolism, this recognition must be a prelude to effective and sustained sanctions against Israel aimed at bringing about its full compliance with its obligations under international law. As shown in the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa, as well as in the current struggles for freedom and justice in the Arab region, world governments do not turn against a patently illegal and immoral regime of oppression simply on ethical grounds; economic interests and hegemonic power dynamics are far weightier in their considerations. In fact, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's militant and war-mongering speech before the US Congress, coupled with US President Barack Obama's latest humiliating submission to Israel's will, shows beyond doubt that anyone still holding on to the hope that Washington is able or willing to contribute to building a just peace in our region is delusional.

The key lesson learned from South Africa is that, in order for world governments to end their complicity with Israel's grave and persistent violations of human rights and international law, they must be compelled to do so through mass, well organized grassroots pressure by social movements and other components of civil society. In this context, BDS has proven to be the most potent and promising strategy of international solidarity with the Palestinian people in our struggle for self-determination, freedom, justice and equality.

In light of the above, and inspired by the will and the power of the people which have given rise to

the Arab spring, the BNC calls upon people of conscience and international solidarity groups to proceed with building a mass BDS movement in the US and elsewhere in the world's most powerful countries before and after September. Only such a mass movement can ensure that whatever diplomatic recognition that transpires at the UN in September on Palestinian statehood will advance the rights of the Palestinian people and raise the price of Israel's occupation, colonialism and apartheid by further isolating it and those complicit in its crimes. A mass solidarity movement that can hold elected officials, especially in the US, accountable to the people, rather than to a Zionist lobby serving Israel's colonial and belligerent agenda that directly conflicts with the interests of the peoples in these countries, is the only hope for a comprehensive and sustainable peace based on justice.

Posted on August 8, 2011 by Palestinian BDS National Committee

[1] Declaration of Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation Among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations: UN General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV) of 24 October 1970.

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* <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2011/bnc-reiterates-its-position-on-september-7794>