

# Pro-Israel Lobby Alarmed by Growth of Boycott, Divestment Movement

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The movement to call Israel to account for its crimes against the Palestinian people is growing, it is “invading the mainstream discourse, becoming part of the constant and unrelenting drumbeat against Israel.” It could eventually threaten the existence of the Jewish state by undermining the support it receives from its strongest backer, the U. S. government.

That was the message of alarm delivered by the Executive Director of the American Israel American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Howard Kohr, to the AIPAC Policy Conference on May 3. [\[1\]](#)

AIPAC is one of the principal organizations that lobby publicly on behalf of Israel in the United States, where it is an important influence on foreign policy. Among the 6,000 dignitaries who attended its policy conference were more than half of the members of the Senate and a third of the members of the House of Representatives. Featured speakers included Vice President Joe Biden, Senator John Kerry, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Israeli President Shimon Peres.

AIPAC and its allies are often alleged to act as a kind of shadow government in Washington, distorting policy in Israel’s interest rather than that of the U.S. This stands reality on its head. The pro-Israel lobby carries real weight in the halls of power, but only because the U.S. and Israel share the same fundamental interests. The U.S. relies on Israel to keep the Arab states of the Middle East divided, weak, and under constant threat of attack, thus ensuring that they remain subservient to Washington. For its part, Israel could not continue to exist in its present form without the strong political and material support it receives from the U.S. It received more than \$2.5 billion in military aid from the U.S. in 2009 [\[2\]](#). Israel and the United States may be partners with shared objectives, but the relationship is a highly unequal one.

Kohr’s address focused on the growing power of the international movement against Israel’s criminal behavior, identifying support for boycott, divestment and sanctions as a particularly worrisome development.

Kohr pointed to a variety of statements and actions against Israel’s onslaught on Palestinians in Gaza, including demonstrations in Spain and Germany. He noted that 400 British academics had demanded that Britain’s Science Museum cancel an event highlighting the work of Israeli scientists and that an Italian trade union calls for a boycott of Israeli products.

"Incredibly, there now is even an Israel Apartheid Week conducted in cities across the globe," he added.

Kohr noted the strength of opposition to Israel in the Middle East, Europe, and in international forums. But he voiced particular concern over the movement's progress in the United States "where Israel stands accused of apartheid and genocide, where Zionism equals racism, where a former president of the United States can publicly accuse Israel of apartheid."

Significantly, the AIPAC leader also insisted on the profound nature of the issues that divide supporters and critics of Israeli policy.

*"What we are witnessing is the attempted delegitimization of Israel; the systematic sowing of doubt that Israel is a nation that has forfeited the world's concern; a nation whose actions are, in the strict meaning of the term, indefensible. This is more than the simple spewing of hatred. This is a conscious campaign to shift policy, to transform the way Israel is treated by its friends to a state that deserves not our support, but our contempt; not our protection, but pressured to change its essential nature...."*

I'm not saying that these allegations have become accepted. But they have become acceptable. More and more they are invading the mainstream discourse, becoming part of the constant and unrelenting drumbeat against Israel. These voices are laying the predicate for an abandonment. They're making the case for Israel's unworthiness to be allowed what is for any nation the first and most fundamental of rights: the right to self-defense. .... They are preparing us for a world in which Israel stands alone, isolated, and at risk....

Now, there's little we can do to stop the boycotts of Israeli goods launched in London or Lisbon or Rome. There's little we can do to stop Israel Apartheid Week. But there is much we can do to stop this campaign from taking hold here. Here where it matters the most, in Washington, where United States policy is forged, we must stop the delegitimization of Israel. We must not let it penetrate the halls of Congress and the counsels of our president. "

To win support for Israel from the U.S. ruling class, Kohr argued, friends of Israel must address "the absolute foundation, the base on which all else rests," that is, the fact that Israel is

*"a Western outpost in the Middle East. To those who make that accusation, I say you are right. Israel is the only democratic country in the region that looks West, that looks to the values and the vision we share of what our society, our country should aim at and aspire to. If that foundation of shared values is shaken, the rationale for the policies we pursue today will be stripped away. The reasons the United States would continue to invest nearly \$3 billion in Israel's security; the willingness to stand with Israel, even alone if need be; the readiness to defend Israel's very existence, all are undermined and undone if Israel is seen to be unjust and unworthy."*

Kohr's argument that Israel is a garrison state, "a Western outpost in the Middle East," the front line of the defense of imperialist interests in the region, is not often stated in such forthright terms. But it is quite accurate, and speaks to the source of the conflict in the region.

### **Palestine appeals for solidarity**

In his speech, Kohr voiced great alarm at the growth in solidarity with the Palestinian people in recent months. The unprecedented growth of the international solidarity movement is a grass-roots response to the crimes committed by Israel during its murderous 22-day assault on Gaza, and the

tight siege of the territory that it maintains to this day.

Solidarity with Palestine is being expressed in many different ways. One of these is the international campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel. Support for BDS has grown considerably in recent months, which is why the AIPAC leader highlighted it as a cause for particular concern.

The BDS movement responds to an appeal for solidarity that was issued by Palestinian civil society in July 2005. More than 170 organizations, including trade unions, political and social organizations, and women's and youth groups, issued the appeal. The signatories represent all three components of the divided Palestinian nation, namely, refugees, Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, and Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The appeal from Palestine said, in part,

*"We, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era. We appeal to you to pressure your respective states to impose embargoes and sanctions against Israel. We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace.*

These non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall;
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in U.N. resolution 194. " [3]

### **Students mobilize for Palestine**

Students have been in the forefront of the solidarity movement with Palestine. The attack on Gaza spurred student solidarity to new heights.

In what one newspaper described as "the biggest student revolt for 20 years," students in the U.K. organized occupations at 34 universities. They used the facilities to hold meetings and show films promoting awareness of the oppression of the Palestinians. Many occupations demanded that their university provide practical aid to Palestinian universities and students. Another common theme of the movement was a call to end all ties to arms manufacturers - the university-military connection being particularly strong in the U.K. The universities promote research that benefits the merchants of death; they also invest in those companies.

The student movement achieved some notable gains. Glasgow Strathclyde University agreed to end its purchases from Eden Springs, an Israeli company that produces bottled water from land in the Golan Heights that Israel refuses to return to Syria. Several universities agreed to provide scholarships to Palestinian students. Others organized fundraising for Palestine; many of these efforts are ongoing. The Oxford and Manchester universities agreed to donate surplus books, journals and other educational material to universities in Palestine.

At the University of Manchester, an emergency meeting of the student union attended by more than

850 people adopted a motion committing the union to campaign for BDS.

One of the most important results of the wave of occupations was to raise consciousness of the Palestine issue among thousands of students and beyond. It also provided activists with valuable experience in organizing on this issue and forged links between them. Following on the occupations, many of the campus Palestine committees have increased their activity in support of BDS. Efforts are also being made to build a more sustained student Palestine solidarity movement. [4]

In early February, new ground was conquered in the U.S. when Hampshire College agreed to implement a policy of divestment, the first college or university in the country to do so. Bowing to a two-year campaign by Students for Justice in Palestine, the Board of Trustees agreed to withdraw its investments from six companies targeted by SJP because they profit from the Israeli occupation of Palestine. SPJ noted that “this groundbreaking decision follows in Hampshire’s history of being the first college in the country to divest from apartheid South Africa 32 years ago, a decision based on similar human rights concerns.” [5]

Archbishop Desmond Tutu hailed the decision: “This is a monumental and historic step in the struggle for Palestinian equality, self-determination and peace in the Holy Land by non-violent means. I see what these students have accomplished as a replica of the support of their college of our struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Hampshire College’s decision to divest should be a guiding example to all institutions of higher learning.” [6]

### **Israeli Apartheid Week**

In his speech to the conference, AIPAC leader Hawk twice referred to Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW), an annual series of presentations and film showings that focus on the Israeli apartheid system and the need for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel. Initiated at the University of Toronto in 2005, IAW events took place this year on five continents in more than 40 cities and towns, 11 of them in Israeli-occupied Palestine, during the first week of March. [7]

Organizers of IAW in Canada, one of the centers of the movement, had to contend with a sustained barrage of attacks and threats from Zionist organizations backed up by the federal government. In February Jason Kenney, Canada’s Minister of Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism, decried the “anti-Zionist version of anti-Semitism” which maintains that “the Jews alone have no right to a homeland.” A few weeks later Kenny took aim directly at IAW. Speaking to the House of Commons, he proclaimed that “Israel Apartheid Week is not about [freedom of opinion] .... We condemn these efforts to single out and attack the Jewish people and their homeland.” He thus suggested, without the slightest basis in fact, that IAW organizers were violating Canada’s criminal code, which bans “hate propaganda.”

University administrators on a number of campuses followed the government’s lead, attempting to disrupt Israeli Apartheid Week. But IAW organizers were successful in beating back these attacks. The daily events unfolded as planned, with audiences of up to 500 in Toronto and Ottawa and 400 in Montreal. [8]

### **Boycott Motorola, Caterpillar, Israeli produce**

Campus-based activities in solidarity with Palestine are one facet of a broader international campaign, which includes targeted boycotts of companies that profit from Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians.

Motorola is one such company. The U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation is urging consumers to “Hang Up On Motorola” until it stops selling communications and surveillance

equipment to the Israeli military and to Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land. The group organized a protest outside Motorola's annual shareholders meeting in Chicago on May 4. Inside the meeting, representatives of the Presbyterian, United Methodist and other churches pressed shareholders to adopt a resolution that would instruct Motorola to follow corporate standards consistent with international law.

The pressure on Motorola has already forced it to give up some ground. After Human Rights Watch announced that its teams had found shrapnel carrying Motorola serial numbers at some of the civilian sites bombed by Israel in its recent assault on Gaza, the company sold the department that makes the fuses for the bombs. [9]

Caterpillar is another target. Israel makes extensive use of its bulldozers to demolish Palestinian homes and to build the apartheid wall. In early February the Church of England announced that it had withdrawn investments of more than £2.2 million (\$3.5 million) from Caterpillar, following a policy that it adopted in 2005 of not investing in companies that support the occupation. Other churches and faith-based organizations have joined the divestment movement against the company. [10]

In Canada, the Committee Against Israeli Apartheid and other solidarity activists have organized a boycott of Indigo Books and Music. They demand that the majority shareholders of the bookstore chain, Heather Reisman and Gerry Schwartz, publicly end their support of Heseg, the Foundation for Lone Soldiers. Reisman and Schwartz created the foundation in 2005 to reward "lone soldiers," volunteers who travel to Israel to serve in the Israeli military. Every year, Heseg grants scholarships to a hundred or more of these zealots to help them remain in Israel after they complete their military service. [11]

For the last two years, solidarity activists have picketed and distributed leaflets periodically outside some of the company's main bookstores. They have also spoken out at some of its high-profile promotional events and at its annual shareholder meetings. The Indigo campaign has been a useful way to reach out and educate the general public about Palestine. It has also helped to maintain the visibility of the issue during periods when the mainstream media chooses to ignore it.

In Europe, consumer boycotts of Israeli products, particularly agricultural produce, are gaining momentum. The U.K.-based daily *The Guardian* reported in its April 3 edition that "Israeli companies are feeling the impact of boycott moves in Europe ... amid growing concern within the Israeli business sector over organized campaigns following the recent attack on Gaza. Last week, the Israel Manufacturers Association reported that 21% of 90 local exporters who were questioned had felt a drop in demand due to boycotts, mostly from the U.K. and Scandinavian countries. Last month, a report from the Israel Export Institute reported that 10% of 400 polled exporters received order cancellation notices this year, because of Israel's assault on Gaza."

The article also cited the Israeli financial daily, *The Marker*, which said that "the horrific images on TV and the statements of politicians in Europe and Turkey are changing the behavior of consumers, businessmen and potential investors. Many European consumers boycott Israeli products in practice." [12]

### **Veolia: a major victory for the corporate boycott campaign**

European solidarity activists have waged a particularly effective campaign against the French multinationals Veolia and Alstom. These companies are part of a consortium that is building a light railway connecting occupied Jerusalem to Israeli settlements in the West Bank, reinforcing Israel's hold on Palestinian land.

In the U.K., the Palestine Solidarity Campaign conducted an active petition campaign against Veolia's attempt to win a 25-year waste collection and recycling contract worth £1 billion (\$1.6 billion) with the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. On March 16 the council announced that Veolia had failed to qualify for the shortlist of three companies that would be invited to bid on the contract.

Also in March, the Swedish national pension fund AP7 announced that it was removing Alstom from its investment portfolio. Activists in Sweden had organized a public education campaign for divestment. The pension fund specifically cited the Jerusalem rail project as the reason it had blacklisted the company. [13]

The following month the Urban Community of Bordeaux cancelled its contract, worth 750 million euros (\$1.0 billion), with Veolia. Although the French municipality cited commercial factors, the cancellation came in the wake of a major controversy over Veolia's involvement in the Jerusalem project. The Galway City Council in Ireland and the Stockholm Community Council in Sweden both recently decided not to renew their contracts with Veolia. [14]

Finally, the pressure became too much for Veolia. On June 9 the Israeli daily *Haaretz* reported that the company was abandoning the Jerusalem project. The paper described the company's decision as a "body blow" to the project, noting that "the French firm had been losing major projects in Europe because of its involvement in the Jerusalem job. Observers claim that's the real reason Veolia opted out." [15]

This marks the first major victory of the corporate boycott campaign. Veolia was forced to divest from the Jerusalem project as a result of a targeted and sustained campaign in various countries, coordinated internationally with the help of the Palestinian BDS National Committee. The victory demonstrates how such campaigns can produce tangible victories. It is likely to spur supporters of Palestine to increase their efforts to force corporations to sever their ties with Israel.

## **Labor solidarity**

Israel's bloody assault on Gaza earlier this year has also led to new initiatives by organized labour in solidarity with Palestine.

Not surprisingly, support for Palestine and the boycott movement is particularly strong in South Africa. Many South Africans see Israel's oppression of Palestinians through the prism of their own experience under apartheid.

In early February dock workers in South Africa, members of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), announced that they would refuse to offload a ship from Israel that was scheduled to dock in Durban on February 8. COSATU and the Palestine Solidarity Committee of South Africa explained the significance of the dock workers' action in this way:

*"The pledge by the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (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 honor, 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 and the Palestine Solidarity Committee reaffirmed their commitment to campaigning for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel. They called on the South African government to sever diplomatic and trade relations with Israel and announced a week of activities under the theme: "Free Palestine! Isolate Apartheid Israel!" [16]

COSATU was the first major national labour federation to call for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel. Several other national labour federations have followed suit, including those of New Zealand and Ireland. On April 24 the convention of the Trade Union Congress of Scotland voted overwhelmingly in favour of BDS after an extensive debate [17]. A few weeks later the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, which represents more than a third of the country's work force, urged its government to lead an international boycott of Israel if it continued to violate Palestinian rights. [18]

Individual unions and labour organisations in many countries have also taken a stand [19]. In June 2007 the national conference of UNISON, the largest union of public workers in the U.K., with more than 1.3 million members, called for "concerted and sustained pressure upon Israel including an economic, cultural, academic and sporting boycott." [20] More recently, in the wake of the assault on Gaza, the leadership of the largest teachers' union in France, the Fédération syndicale unitaire, endorsed the BDS campaign and called on the European Union to impose sanctions on Israel. [21]

On the other side of the Atlantic, in April 2008 the Canadian Union of Postal Workers became the first country-wide union in North America to adopt a BDS policy. Denis Lemelin, the national president of CUPW, has spoken at a number of meetings and demonstrations in defence of Palestinian rights over the last year. On January 7 he wrote to Prime Minister Stephen Harper on behalf of the union to ask the Canadian government to apply a policy of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel to force it to comply with international law, including the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes. [22]

In recent years CUPW has waged a series of battles against the government's moves to downsize and privatize postal services. The union also has a history of supporting international freedom struggles. It was the first union in Canada to call for a boycott of apartheid South Africa. In a joint statement, several solidarity organizations noted that the union "played a lead role in labour solidarity with South African workers, engaging in concrete actions such as the refusal to handle mail from South Africa." [23]

The Ontario division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which represents more than 220,000 workers in the public sector, has played a key role in blazing the trail for labour solidarity in Canada. The decision of CUPE Ontario's May 2006 convention to endorse boycott, divestment and sanctions sparked massive controversy, thereby drawing international attention to the Palestinian appeal for BDS. Supporters of Israel in various quarters including government officials, editorialists, and even leaders of other unions, directed a torrent of abuse against the union, alleging that the decision was anti-Semitic, undemocratic, and outside the union's jurisdiction. Sid Ryan, the president of CUPE Ontario, received numerous death threats; his family was also threatened. Ryan and the chair of the union's international solidarity committee were inundated with hostile telephone and email messages.

Ryan and the union have stood firm against the pressure. Union activists organised an extensive grass-roots education campaign, using an attractive 16-page pamphlet "Towards peace and justice in the Middle East" produced by the CUPE Ontario international solidarity committee. Ryan continued to speak out for Palestine on every possible occasion. As a result, the Zionists were unable to find a base of support in the union; they chose not to contest the BDS policy at the 2008 convention. But the public campaign of vilification of Sid Ryan and CUPE Ontario continues, boosted by a personal attack on Ryan by the Canadian government.

### **Quebec teachers, students support boycott**

A year after the CUPE Ontario convention, a major union in Quebec joined the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement.

The Fédération nationale des enseignantes et enseignants du Québec (National Teachers Federation of Quebec) is the largest union of teachers in higher education in Quebec. Its 23,500 members work at community colleges, universities, and private schools. At its May 31 - June 1, 2007 meeting, the federal council of the union reiterated its long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people and its right to self-determination. The council also endorsed the BDS campaign. [24]

In November 2007 the FNEEQ published a special edition of its magazine, *Carnets*, with the title, "Do more for Palestine." The attractive, 32-page magazine contains articles that explain what life is like under Israeli occupation, Israel's "separation" wall, why Canada is not a friend of Palestine, and the situation of women under the occupation. Five pages present the need to boycott, divest from, and sanction Israel; the views of two Israeli citizens who support BDS, Ilan Pappé and Michel Warschawski, are featured. The lead editorial, written by the president of the FNEEQ, Ronald Cameron, explains that the union is educating its members so that they will understand why taking concrete action to support the Palestinian people is an urgent issue of labor solidarity. [25]

Compared to the abuse showered on CUPE Ontario, criticism of the FNEEQ's decision to join the boycott-Israel movement has been relatively mild. Quebec is the area of the country where popular sentiment is most favourable to the Palestinian cause. Various unions in Quebec have been active on this issue over the years, and the union leadership in higher education supports the Palestinian cause. (CUPW, discussed earlier, is one of a small number of major Canada-wide unions that have a sizable membership in Quebec.)

The FNEEQ's record of support for Palestine is particularly strong. In October 2004 it sponsored a delegation of 20 Quebec teachers who attended an international conference on Education, Globalization and Social Change in Ramallah, Palestine. (Willie Madisha, then president of COSATU, also participated in the conference.). The FNEEQ has participated in several other Quebec-based solidarity delegations to Palestine since then. In late May a 17-person delegation from Quebec that included members of the FNEEQ, CUPE and the CUPW spent a week investigating the situation in

the occupied Palestinian territories. Israeli authorities turned them back when they attempted to enter Gaza.

The FNEEQ is also helping to educate students about Palestine. It organized workshops on the issue on community college and university campuses across Quebec during the 2007 - 2008 school year, in collaboration with the Quebec Public Interest Research Group and the Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante. The ASSÉ represents approximately 42,000 Quebec students. In May 2008 it became the first major student union in Canada to join the international BDS campaign. [26]

The FNEEQ and the ASSÉ joined forces again this May when they jointly published *Israël Ne Peut Pas Rester Impuni ! (Israel Cannot Remain Unpunished!)* a 14-page dossier that explains how Israeli military rule undermines the right to education in Palestine. Much of the content consists of translations of material produced in Palestine, notably by the Right to Education Campaign at Birzeit University. The two unions have made copies of the dossier available to the public on their web sites. [27]

At its May 30-31 congress, the FNEEQ unanimously reaffirmed its support for BDS. It also decided to participate in the World Education Forum, part of the World Social Forum movement, that will be held in Palestine in October 2010. [28]

### **Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia: no ties with Israel**

One of the aims of the international boycott-Israel movement is to induce governments to break all economic and diplomatic relations with Israel, treating the Zionist state as an international pariah. This is starting to become a reality in Latin America.

Cuba broke relations with Israel in September 1973, on the eve of the Yom Kippur war [29]. Time and again in international forums the revolutionary government has spoken out in support of the struggle of the Palestinian and Arab peoples and against Israeli aggression. It has translated those words into action whenever it could.

However, for decades Cuba's has stood alone in the region in its support for Palestine. In the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean, domination by Washington was the rule, and with it, support for U.S. foreign policy. Israel became notorious for the support it gave - through arm shipments, special "advisors" and the like - to bloody dictatorships from Guatemala to Chile.

But now a process of radical transformation is unfolding across the region. Radical, popular movements have emerged in many countries as large numbers of working people begin to act to improve their circumstances. These movements are putting their stamp on society and government. One important result of this process has been the creation of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), an alliance of seven countries that promotes fair trade and mutual aid based on principles of solidarity rather than profit. ALBA also champions respect for national sovereignty and unity of the region against U.S. domination. [30]

The rising tide of struggles in Latin America has been accompanied by a rise in support for the Palestinian people, including by the governments of the region. ALBA has led the way on this.

In September 2008 the ALBA countries were instrumental in securing the election of Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann as president of the General Assembly of the United Nations. D'Escoto is a well-known supporter of Palestine. As foreign minister of the Sandinista government of Nicaragua during the 1980s, he played a prominent role in exposing Israel's role in the "dirty war" that Washington

organized against his country.

On November 24 d'Escoto told a meeting at the U.N. that 60 years after partition, "the failure to create a Palestinian state as promised is the single greatest failure in the history of the United Nations." He went on to say that "although different, what is being done against the Palestinian people seems to me to be a version of the hideous policy of apartheid." [31] Addressing the General Assembly later the same day, he repeated the apartheid characterization, adding that "I believe it is very important that we in the United Nations use this term. We must not be afraid to call something what it is." [32]

D'Escoto also urged the member states to consider implementing sanctions against Israel. "More than twenty years ago we in the United Nations took the lead from civil society when we agreed that sanctions were required to provide a non-violent means of pressuring South Africa to end its violations. Today, perhaps we in the United Nations should consider following the lead of a new generation of civil society, who are calling for a similar non-violent campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions to pressure Israel to end its violations."

ALBA was founded by Venezuela and Cuba, and the Venezuelan government has been especially forthright in speaking and acting for justice in the Middle East. This is an expression of the profound anti-imperialist character of the struggle that has been unfolding in Venezuela since President Hugo Chavez was elected in 1999.

In July 2006 Chavez forcefully denounced the war that Israel had unleashed on Lebanon, and Venezuela matched its words with deeds. It withdrew its ambassador from Israel, sent 20,000 tons of emergency aid to Lebanon, and began a drive to raise funds for Lebanese reconstruction. [33]

Soon after Israel began its attack on Gaza, Venezuelans took to the streets in protest. Speaking to a rally in Caracas on January 9, 2009, Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro announced that his country would send 80 tons of medicine, water, and food aid to Gaza, as well as 30 doctors and a humanitarian work brigade.

On January 14, both Venezuela and Bolivia broke off diplomatic relations with Israel. When Israel retaliated by expelling Venezuelan diplomats, Chavez responded that "it is an honour for this socialist government and this revolutionary people to have our representatives expelled by a genocidal government such as Israel." [34] Bolivia's president, Evo Morales, announced that his country would formally indict Israel's leaders for war crimes in the International Criminal Court. "They've made the world move backwards with crimes against humanity that we haven't seen since Rwanda and Yugoslavia," he said. [35] Bolivia is also a member of ALBA.

On April 27 Venezuela and the Palestinian Authority established formal diplomatic relations and opened a Palestinian embassy in Caracas. Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki said that the embassy would coordinate solidarity with Palestine across Latin America. [36] A Palestinian embassy has functioned in Havana, Cuba for decades.

## **A growing movement, larger struggles ahead**

The BDS movement now includes its first national Jewish organization. At its first annual general meeting on June 14, the Independent Jewish Voices (Canada) overwhelmingly endorsed boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel. "Independent Jewish Voices has voted to join the international boycott campaign because we stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people and support their right to self-determination," said Diana Ralph, co-chair of the organization. "We are

calling on the Canadian government and all Members of Parliament to push for immediate sanctions on Israel." IJV has chapters in seven Canadian cities. [37]

Israel's prestige and moral standing in the world has suffered a serious setback as a result of its barbaric attack on the besieged population of Gaza. Growing numbers of people are coming to understand Israel's crimes, the apartheid nature of the Israeli state, and the need to express solidarity with the Palestinian people through concrete action. The protests against Israel's actions in many countries were unprecedented in their size and duration. New forces are joining the international movement in solidarity with Palestine. As part of this process, the international campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel is emerging as one of the most important ways to demonstrate this solidarity.

This survey of recent developments provides only a partial picture of the scale and diversity that the BDS movement is acquiring as it grows. (The movement is actively promoting an academic and cultural boycott of Israel, for example. [38].)

But even this partial account is sufficient to demonstrate that the international campaign to boycott Israel is making headway on a number of fronts. Although still relatively new, the movement has achieved some notable successes. It shows the promise of developing into a powerful and sustained international force that can help attain justice for the Palestinian people.

AIPAC's call to arms is a grudging recognition of these initial successes of the movement and, above all, of its potential. It is evident that supporters of the Jewish-only Israeli state - be they official lobbyists, powerful government figures, or others - intend to redouble their efforts to smear the BDS movement as anti-Semitic and to suppress public debate of Israel's crimes. Supporters of the rights of Palestinians are responding by uniting with others to defend the right to free speech on these issues and by reaching out to win new support for the boycott-Israel campaign.

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## **P.S.**

\* Art Young is a member of the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid in Toronto.

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## **Footnotes**

[1] <http://www.aipac.org/Publications/S...>

[2] Israel received \$2.55 billion in "security" aid from the U.S. during fiscal year 2009, the first year of a new ten-year program. U.S. aid will increase annually, then level off at \$3.1 billion for the last six years of the program. (All amounts in this article are in U.S. dollars unless otherwise noted.)

[3] "Palestinian Civil Society Calls for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel," <http://www.stophewall.org/download...>

[4] "Students demand justice for Palestine," <http://www.palestinecampaign.org/fi...> and information from Katan Alder, a participant in the movement.

[5] Under heavy fire from supporters of Israel, the administration subsequently denied that it had acted because of the Palestine issue. But the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees at which the decision was taken explicitly acknowledge "the good work of SJP that brought this issue to the attention of the [investment] committee." Furthermore, the college has not rescinded

its decision to divest. See <http://www.hsyp.org/archive/2009/02...>

[6] <http://www.hsyp.org/endorsements/>

[7] "About Israeli Apartheid Week," <http://apartheidweek.org/en/about>

[8] "For more information about attempts to repress Israeli Apartheid Week, pro-Palestine advocacy, and free speech more generally, see:

"Israeli Apartheid Week Beats Back Attacks on Free Speech" By John Riddell,

<http://rabble.ca/news/israeli-apart...>, "For Free Expression on Palestine" by Justin Podur,

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