

Standing in Solidarity with Palestinian University Workers



A Background

**Ontario University Workers
Coordinating Committee**

What is Education Like for Palestinians?

- Over one third of Palestinians are students in full-time school or university education and tens of thousands of adults work in the education sector. According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, 80 per cent of Palestinians report significant “difficulty in going about their daily lives, including getting to school or university,” as a result of Israeli imposed restrictions (www.pcbs.gov.ps).
- Palestinian schools and universities are regularly targeted by the Israeli military. During the recent attack on Gaza, many Palestinian students were killed while in school and while they were going to classes. In the first three weeks of 2009, 37 United Nations schools were damaged and a total of 67 educational facilities targeted by the Israeli military (Palestinian Center for Human Rights: www.pchrgaza.org).
- Tens of thousands of students and teachers have been arrested and detained by the Israeli military. Most face some form of torture or abuse while in detention (www.addameer.org).
- The Israeli military regularly orders schools and universities to close for prolonged periods of time – severely disrupting the educational system.

Why Should OUWCC Act?

- In 2005, over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations, including the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), urged the world to adopt a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israeli institutions. This campaign was modeled on the BDS movement that helped end South African apartheid.
- In 2006, CUPE-Ontario passed Resolution 50 in a nearly unanimous vote, endorsing the 2005 BDS call from Palestine. CUPE's resolution was historic, winning it praise from around the world, including the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), progressive Jewish and Israeli voices committed to real peace and appreciation from the Palestinian labour movement.
- The most recent Israeli assault in Gaza, known as Operation Cast Lead, resulted in the deaths of over 1300 Palestinians (mostly civilians), including over 300 children, and 4,300 injuries. Schools and universities were bombed and, in some cases, completely destroyed (Palestinian Center for Human Rights: www.pchrgaza.org).

Why a Boycott?

- This is not a call to boycott individual Israeli academics. Rather, the boycott call is aimed at academic institutions and the institutional connections that exist between universities here and those in Israel. This means targeting institution-to-institution linkages through joint research projects (particularly of a military nature), exchanges, etc (www.pacbi.org).
- The aim of the academic boycott is to pressure Israel to fully comply with international law. By cutting off financial support and our connections to those institutions involved in the oppression of the Palestinian people. The call for a boycott of academic institutions is part of a broader campaign of Israeli boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) that CUPE Ontario had already approved in 2006.





"The Israeli occupation doesn't want us to learn. At one of the checkpoints on my way home to Nablus one time, an Israeli soldier asked me to open my bag which had nothing in it but my university books. They detained me at the checkpoint for over an hour just because I am a student, and before they let me go they tore up my books. That shows their attitude towards Palestinian education."
Saa'ed, from Nablus, third-year media student at Birzeit University, May 2005.
(Birzeit University Right to Education Campaign: <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu>)

Why Should University Workers Show Solidarity With Their Sisters and Brothers in Palestine?

As workers committed to equitable, accessible and high-quality education, we understand the importance that universities have for the future of any society. Every day we are reminded that an injustice to one is an injustice to all. Given Israel's targeting of Palestinian educational institutions, it is incumbent on us to speak out.

As Dr. Carmela Armanios of Birzeit University in occupied Ramallah (Palestine) explains, international solidarity is important because it: "makes an impact on students and teachers, feeling that we're not alone and people around the world know about us and that we deserve to live like other people do [...] Silence I would say is more painful than the bullets of occupation."

The President of the UN General Assembly, Father Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, recently stated: "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 nonviolent 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." (Boycott National Committee: www.bdsmovement.net)

Answering an Appeal from our Palestinian Colleagues

Expressing solidarity is particularly important in cases where our colleagues are directly appealing for our support. In June 2005, over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations signed a call for a campaign of boycott, sanctions and divestment (BDS) as the only non-violent means of pressuring Israel to comply with international law. The demands of the campaign are based on respect for fundamental human rights at the core of any lasting peace in the region. They include:

- The right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, as stipulated in UN resolution 194;
- A complete end of Israel's illegal military occupation of all Arab lands (including the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights), and;
- Equal rights for Palestinian 'citizens' of Israel who face legislated discrimination in the realms of property ownership, family law and citizenship rights.

Among the Palestinian unions and organizations issuing this appeal for solidarity, our colleagues from the following university-linked unions have specifically called for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions, including the:

- Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees;
- Palestinian Teachers' Federation;
- University Teachers Association – Palestine;
- General Union of Palestinian Workers;
- Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions;
- Federation of Independent Unions;
- Palestinian Writers' Federation;
- Palestinian League of Artists;
- Palestinian Journalists' Federation;
- General Union of Palestinian Women;
- Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel.

According to a statement issued by the Palestinian BDS National Campaign in response to Israel's recent assault on Gaza: "Now, more than ever....[we call] upon international civil society not just to protest and condemn in diverse forms Israel's massacre in Gaza, but also to join and intensify the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel to end its impunity and to hold it accountable for its persistent violation of international law and Palestinian rights." (Boycott National Committee: www.bdsmovement.net)

Boycotting Israeli Academic Institutions: A Non-Violent Response

Many Israeli academic institutions are at the forefront of military research and development that helps to sustain an illegal and immoral military occupation. Some academic institutions are built on the ruins of Palestinian villages (eg. Tel Aviv University) or on confiscated Palestinian lands (eg. Hebrew University), while still others are built in illegal 'Israeli-only' settlements in the West Bank (eg. Bar Ilan University's campus in Ariel). Israeli academic institutions have also been complicit in racially profiling students, denying equal treatment, and suppressing controversial research (Palestinian Academic and Cultural Boycott Initiative: www.pacbi.org).

The call for an institutional boycott of Israeli universities is aimed at the proliferation of institutional links between Israeli universities and overseas partners in the form of university pairing, exchanges, joint programs, research initiatives, etc. and not against individual Israeli academics (regardless of their opinions). Briefly, our Palestinian colleagues and their Israeli allies believe that such institutional ties serve to normalize and legitimate Israeli state-funded institutions that act as support mechanisms for the Israeli state's repeated violations of international law.

Such institutional links send the message to Palestinians that university administrations in Canada and in other countries support the status quo in Israel/Palestine and that the daily violations of Palestinian academic freedom and the right to education are not their concern. The campaign to boycott Israeli academic institutions is therefore modeled on a similar campaign of boycott, sanctions and divestment (BDS) targeting South African academic institutions during the struggle

against apartheid in the 1970s and 1980s. Such a strategy might include calling on Ontario universities and university workers to:

- Refuse participation in academic cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli universities;
- Advocate a boycott of Israeli universities, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies;
- Promote divestment from Israel by Ontario academic institutions;
- Work toward the condemnation of Israeli policies and actions in the occupied territories by pressing for resolutions to be adopted by academic and professional organizations and associations;
- Actively develop links and support-mechanisms for Israeli and Palestinian institutions and departments that are publicly working in solidarity with the Palestinian BDS campaign;
- Foster initiatives that can help in the reconstruction of Palestinian educational institutions and ensure opportunities for Palestinian students and faculty.

As the original "Call for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel" argues, such measures are necessary: "Given that all forms of international intervention have until now failed to force Israel to comply with international law or to end its repression of the Palestinians, which has manifested itself in many forms, including siege, indiscriminate killing, wanton destruction and the racist colonial wall."



In May 2006, a fourth-year Computer Science student at Birzeit University was shot in the back as he walked towards his class for a 9am exam:

"When my friends and I arrived at the University there were jeeps at the entrance and the soldiers were making insulting hand-gestures at us and saying things to us. As we continued to walk

away from the jeeps towards the University to reach our classes on time, the jeeps came up the ramp and started shooting at us. I was shot in the back as I tried to get away from the soldiers and the crowd. I'm lucky my arm is ok, but I missed my exam which was at 9am and don't know what will happen to my final year now."

(Birzeit University Right to Education Campaign: <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu>)



Palestinian Education Under Occupation: A Snapshot

Even prior to Israel's recent attacks on Gaza that left over 1300 Palestinians dead (including over 300 children) and over 5000 injured, the Palestinian people have faced concerted and systematic Israeli attempts to curtail their right to education and academic freedom:

- Palestinian education has been continuously under attack since 1948 when over 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes and over 430 Palestinian towns and villages destroyed.
- As a result, generations of Palestinians refugees and their descendents have grown up attending and working in over-crowded UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) schools that operate in refugee camps across the Middle East. These schools have frequently been targeted by the Israeli military (United National Relief Works Association www.unrwa.org).
- The 3.5-million Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation face constant closure of their educational establishments, obstacles on movement to their work places and the frequent targeting of education workers and students for arrest, torture and assassination.
- The 1.2 million Palestinian 'citizens' of Israel face chronic underfunding for education in their communities and numerous systemic obstacles to advancement in Israeli higher-education.

Here is a brief snapshot of the obstacles faced by our Palestinian colleagues in the education sector and their children on a daily basis:

- Israel separates, isolates and ghettoizes Palestinian areas by constructing the illegal apartheid wall inside the West Bank, operating over 600 military roadblocks and checkpoints, imposing frequent closures of cities, prolonged curfews, and prison-like restrictions on the movement of all Palestinians, thus preventing thousands of education workers and students from reaching their schools and universities.
- Over one third of Palestinians are students in full-time school or university education. According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, 80 per cent of Palestinians report significant "difficulty in going about their daily lives, including getting to school or university." (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: www.pcbs.gov.ps)
- Nearly 78% of the population lives below the poverty line, resulting in many poor families alternating which kids they send to school so they can share the same uniform.
- Over 4,000 Palestinian children have been arrested by the Israeli Army since September 2000, and at least 350 children are currently held in Israeli prisons and detention centers. Hundreds of university aged students are also being held arbitrarily by Israeli prison authorities and thousands have been subjected to arbitrary interrogations. Students who object to such questioning are then harassed at checkpoints, denied work permits and subjected to house invasions (Defence for Children International – Palestine Section www.dci-pal.org).
- During the 7 years of the first Intifada (1987-1993), all of the Palestinian universities & colleges were closed by the Israeli authorities. In recent years:
 - * Birzeit University was sealed off by an Israeli Army roadblock for nearly 3 years between 2001-2003.
 - * Al-Quds University in East Jerusalem is now surrounded by an 8-meter high concrete wall, separating it from 36% of students.
 - * Hebron University and the Palestine Polytechnic University in Hebron were closed down by Israeli military order for much of 2003. The students physically broke down the gates to their universities to reconvene classes and demand their right to an education.
- 8 out of the 11 universities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been shelled or broken into by the Israeli Army since September 2000 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: www.dci-pal.org).

Education workers and students from Gaza have faced a number of additional difficulties in recent years:

- Queen's University in Belfast, produced a report stating that 98% of children in Gaza suffer from psychological trauma, serious and debilitating psychiatric and psychological effects. The head of UNRWA in Gaza, John Ging, stated that "Among other things, the cumulative impact of years of violence and closures, of disrupted schooling and endemic poverty is clear from the stark exam results of Gaza's schoolchildren." (Reuters Press: www.reuters.com/article/homepageCrisis/idUSL03267740.CH.2400)
- As of October 2008, the Israeli siege has cost Gaza universities 50 million dollars in development projects due to their inability to import raw materials for construction, mostly affecting medical and technological facilities (Palestinian Center for Human Rights: www.pchrgaza.org).
- Since April 9th, 2008, the Israeli blockade on fuel supply to the Gaza strip has paralysed 50% of the educational sector, as half the students at all levels of education are unable to reach their schools and universities. This compromises the ability to properly run universities and schools without adequate electricity, water or heating, especially during the winter months.
- In September 2007, UNRWA revealed that 30% of their students were without textbooks as the Israeli army prevented them from entering Gaza. UNRWA educates 200,000 students in Gaza, about half the total number of school children in the Strip. The ban was extended to all raw materials such as paper, ink, and binding materials (United Nations Relief Works Association: www.unrwa.org).
- Students from the Gaza Strip are forbidden from attending Palestinian universities in the West Bank. After the closing of Rafah crossing in June 2007, 722 Palestinian university students studying abroad also found themselves trapped in Gaza. Similar restrictions apply to university workers wishing to go abroad.
- Another 2,000 students enrolled in foreign schools were also trapped. They are part of the 7,500 Gazans who need permission to continue their work, education or medical treatment outside of Gaza (Palestinian Center for Human Rights: www.pchrgaza.org).
- 73 educational institutions have been partially or fully destroyed in the Gaza Strip since September 2000, including kindergartens, schools, and a teacher training college completely demolished on 16 March 2004 (Defence for Children International – Palestine Section: www.dci-pal.org).

As a 25 January 2009 press release issued by the recently bombed Islamic University in Gaza explains: "We firmly believe that the illegal Israeli occupation has deliberately and continuously targeted Palestinian academic institutions, including IUG, in an attempt to keep the Palestinians ignorant and insecure so that the oppressive Israeli occupation could last longer." (Islamic University of Gaza: www.iugaza.edu.ps)



***Palestinian students trapped in Gaza, unable to attend their universities abroad, demonstrate in front of the United Nations office in Gaza City, September 2008.
(Wissam Nassar/MaanImages)***

The Recent Attacks on Gaza: Operation Cast Lead

On 27 December 2008, Israel launched "Operation Cast Lead" to further the collective punishment of the 1.5 million residents of the Gaza Strip who have been suffering from an illegal Israeli siege since 2006. The siege is a form of collective punishment contrary to the Geneva Conventions and serves to heavily restrict Palestinian access to food, energy supplies, water resources, medicines, education, international assistance (including school supplies), etc. As a result of the Israeli siege on Gaza, the Palestinian residents of this coastal strip were facing a serious humanitarian crisis according to UN officials and international aid agencies before the onset of recent hostilities.

During Israel's 22-day military campaign, Palestinian educational institutions were specifically targeted, prompting condemnation from the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and countless international human rights organizations, universities, and labour unions around the world. The following is a short sampling of some recent Israeli military attacks on Palestinian educational institutions.

(See Palestinian Center for Human Rights - www.pchrgaza.org and the Lancet, <http://www.thelancetglobalhealthnetwork.com> for full details.)

- On December 27, 2008 an air missile hit the Gaza Training Centre in downtown Gaza City killing 8 students and wounding 19;
- On the same day, the Gaza Music School which was located in the Palestinian Red Crescent Society building in Gaza City was destroyed along with the entire building by the first wave of Israeli bombardments;
- On December 29, 2008 F-16 fighter planes leveled the Science and Engineering Laboratories and caused extensive damage to the Central Library at the Islamic University in Gaza City, just a few hours before some of its 20,000 students were to enter the campus to conduct exams;
- On January 1, 2009 the Palestinian Ministry of Education was hit by Israeli bombing raids on government facilities in Gaza City;
- On January 3, 2009 a jet leveled the private American International School in Gaza, killing its security guard and denying some 200 students their education for the foreseeable future;
- Later the same day, the Agricultural School in Beit Hanoun was damaged by 4 artillery shells and 4 more schools were damaged;
- On January 5, 2009 Israeli aircraft fired 15 missiles around the Omar Ibn Al Khattab School in Beit Lahia;
- On January 6, 30 civilians were killed and 55 injured when Israeli artillery shells landed outside a United Nations-run school in Gaza where Palestinian refugees had been sheltering. Another UNRWA school had been similarly attacked earlier that day (killing another three individuals);
- On January 16, 2009 the headquarters of the University Teachers Association-Palestine, in Gaza, was bombed by the Israeli military during its indiscriminate attacks in the Tal el-Hawa neighborhood of Gaza City;
- On the same day, Israeli helicopter gunships opened fire at the Mashrou neighbourhood in Beit Lahia, hitting houses and the yard of UNRWA's Beit Lahia boys' school, which shelters displaced civilians. As a result, 13-year-old Falastin Tanboursa, was severely injured. Her leg was amputated later;
- On January 17, 2009 Israeli forces fired a shell - believed to be white phosphorus - which landed in the UNRWA Beit Lahia Boys School, which shelters civilians. As the refugees tried to evacuate the school, an artillery shell struck a classroom, where civilians were being sheltered. Two children were killed and their mother, Nujoud Shaban al-Ashqar, was injured; another shell that hit the school injured 14, including 6 children;
- On the same day aid agencies reported that a total of 67 schools had been damaged or destroyed by the Israeli military as a result of Operation Cast Lead.



Children stand in the remains of a UNRWA School in Beit Lahia, Gaza, shelled by the Israeli army on January 17, 2009. (Lyad El Baba)



Islamic University of Gaza, February 2007. (Wesam Saleh/MaanImages)



Islamic University of Gaza, December 29 2008. (AFP/Getty Images)

“Outside my home (which is close to the 2 largest universities in Gaza), a missile fell on a large group of young men, university students, they’d been warned not to stand in groups, it makes them an easy target, but they were waiting for buses to take them home. 7 were killed, 4 students and 3 of our neighbors’ kids, young men who were from the same family (Rayes) and were best friends. As I’m writing this I can hear a funeral procession go by outside, I looked out the window a moment ago and it was the 3 Rayes boys. They spent all their time together when they were alive, they died together and now they’re sharing the same funeral together. Nothing could stop my 14 year old brother from rushing out to see the bodies of his friends laying in the street after they were killed. He hasn’t spoken a word since.”

Safa, a young woman living in Gaza, December 28 2008

These attacks disproportionately affect the future of the 50% of Gazans who are under 18 years of age. The attacks have also taken away the livelihoods of thousands of university sector workers as well. According to Oxford University Professor Karma Nabulsi these attacks are calculated to silence Palestinian appeals for justice and a brighter future in the region: "The role and power of education in an occupied society is enormous. Education posits possibilities, opens horizons. Freedom of thought contrasts sharply with the apartheid wall, the shackling checkpoints, and the choking prisons." (Guardian Newspaper: www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/10/gaza-schools)

The Right to Education

As can be seen from the incidents above, Palestinian educational workers face considerable obstacles to their work. Palestinian security guards, parking officials, skilled trades people, clerical and administrative staff, caretaking personnel, teachers, food service workers, technical support staff, researchers and library workers have all been affected by Israeli policies of siege, checkpoints, restrictions on movement, and arrest. These are Palestinian workers that work in the same sectors we do and it is their appeals that we need to heed.

While the Israeli military treats Palestinian education as a 'privilege' that can be taken away by its occupation forces at will, the Right to Education is actually a universal right under international law. In fact most UN conventions dealing with human rights include references to the right to education, including the:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, and;
- A number of conventions related to discrimination against women and girls, minorities, and the differently abled.

Since the right to education is considered a universal right it is also enshrined in Canadian law at both the provincial Ontario level and federally. Despite these provisions Palestinian education workers and students continue to face immobilization, poverty, gendered violence, harassment, and humiliation as part of a racist and repressive Israeli occupation regime – sadly, this all occurs without a word of protest from Ottawa.



In November 2005, Palestinian teachers held classes in the road outside an Israeli checkpoint in the West Bank city of Hebron in protest of intrusive searches of children on their way to school. (BBC News)

Institutionalizing Canadian Complicity with Israeli Apartheid

In recent years, the Canadian government has radically shifted away from its traditional voting patterns in the UN that tended to support the international consensus on Palestine. Since 2004, Canadian governments have instead consistently voted with a small minority of countries - essentially the USA and a handful of aid-dependent Pacific-island micro-states - against UN resolutions that support basic Palestinian human rights or that seek to censure Israel for Human Rights violations.

In recent years, Canada has become more vocal in its unqualified support for Israeli actions:

- In the spring of 2006 the Canadian government became the first government to cut assistance to the Palestinian Authority (PA) after elections deemed free and fair by the international community - including by monitors from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) - were won by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). As a result, nearly \$30 million in assistance to the PA was cut, affecting a wide-range of programs, including a number of important reconstruction initiatives.
- In the summer of 2006, the Harper government stated that Israel's illegal attack on Lebanon which killed 1200 Lebanese (mostly civilians), injured thousands and displaced over 1 million was a 'measured response.' Even though a Canadian peacekeeper was killed by the Israeli military, several members of a Lebanese-Canadian family were massacred and thousands of Lebanese-Canadians were left stranded during the crisis - Canada refused to condemn Israel's massive bombing campaign.
- During Israel's most recent assault on Gaza, the Canadian government again uncritically supported Israel's "right to defend itself," blaming all civilian deaths caused by indiscriminate Israeli shelling and air-raids on Hamas, and refused to release any aid to the beleaguered population. After enormous public pressure, Canada committed to sending a mere \$4 million in aid to Gaza, a fraction of the over \$600-million necessary for reconstruction according to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon.

It should be noted that as a result of the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA), there is now well over \$1.3 billion in two way trade between the two countries. CIFTA imposes no limitations on the import or export of military equipment between Israel and Canada. According to Department of Foreign Affairs figures for two-way trade in regulated military goods between Canada and Israel amount to some \$3 million each year. This figure doesn't include the over \$200 million dollars in military-related business-to-business investments, venture capital initiatives and partnerships between Canadian and Israeli firms.

Much of this 'security sector' cooperation is coordinated through the Canada-Israel Industrial Research and Development Foundation (CIIRDF), which is a bilateral government-to-government initiative designed to promote public sector research and development. Canadian firms like Nortel, Bombardier, Frontline Robotics, Mawashi Corp, Diamond Aircraft, Senstar-Stellar, Athlone



Global Security, Macdonald Dettwiler and Associates (MDA), among others have benefited from direct partnerships with a range of Israeli security firms and the Israeli military. This increasing cooperation has been formalized with the signing of a joint “Declaration of Intent” on security sector cooperation between the Canadian Ministry of Public Safety and the Israeli Ministry of Public Security – thereby institutionalizing the steadily growing cooperation between Canadian and Israeli security and police organizations in recent years.

In the University sector, Canadian university administrations have been actively seeking out partnerships with Israeli academic institutions. Dozens of University Presidents have issued public statements against the academic boycott of Israeli institutions and have actively repressed pro-Palestinian student groups on Canadian campuses. However, not a single university administration has publicly condemned Israeli attacks on Palestinian institutions of higher learning. This is despite the fact that thousands of Canadian university workers, faculty and students have demanded concrete expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people.



In the summer of 2008, University of Toronto President David Naylor travelled to Israel to take part in meetings with university leaders, government officials and private sector leaders in an effort to learn from Israelis how to better commercialize academic research. Referring to students and faculty at U of T who protested developing institutional relationships between U of T and Israeli academic institutions,

Naylor said, “They may or may not agree with all the domestic and foreign policies of government A or B or C. But that doesn’t stop people at U of T from building institutional bridges and positive personal relationships.” Currently there is an inter-university memorandum of agreement between U of T and Hebrew University, which illegally constructed its student housing and university offices on Palestinian land owned primarily by residents of the destroyed Palestinian village of Lifta.



Bulldozers and armed security guards hired by Hebrew University Properties, Ltd. at the home of the Al-Helou family in Jerusalem, confiscating their land for the expansion of the university dormitories, in 2004. (Shirabe Yamada)



The Al-Helou family tried to prevent the confiscation by sitting in the path of the bulldozers and calling the police. However, when the police arrived they joined the armed guards and began attacking the family. Everyone, including old people, women and children, was beaten and tear-gassed.

Questions and Answers on the CUPE Ontario Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions

What does CUPE Ontario mean by Academic Boycott?

It is important to understand that this is not a call to boycott individual Israeli academics. Rather, the boycott call is aimed at academic institutions and the institutional connections that exist between universities here and those in Israel.

This could include calling on Ontario universities and university workers to:

- Refuse to participate in academic cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli universities, such as participating in conferences in Israel, refereeing or editing articles for Israeli journals, or evaluating research proposals for Israeli institutions.
- Advocate a boycott of Israeli universities, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies.
- Promote divestment from Israel by Ontario academic institutions.
- Work toward the condemnation of Israeli policies and actions in the occupied territories by pressing for resolutions to be adopted by academic and professional organizations and associations.

CUPE Ontario is taking this action in response to an appeal from the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees.

Why Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions?

The recent assault on Gaza has seen the total destruction of the Palestinian educational system. The Israeli military has bombed numerous universities and schools. On January 7th, Israeli forces killed over 40 Palestinian civilians who had taken shelter in a United Nations school.

The aim of the academic boycott is to put pressure on Israel to fully comply with international law, by cutting off financial support and our connections to those institutions involved in the oppression of the Palestinian people.

The call for a boycott of academic institutions is part of a broader campaign of Israeli boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) that CUPE Ontario had already approved in 2006.

What is the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS)?

In 2005, over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations, including the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), urged the world to adopt a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israeli institutions. This campaign was modeled on the BDS movement that helped end South African apartheid.

The aim of this campaign is to block the political, military and economic support that allows Israel to continue violating international law.

Is CUPE Ontario the only one calling for this? Who else supports these actions?

This campaign has wide support. As already mentioned, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Father Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, has given his support to this campaign. In the first week of January some 300 academics signed a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper calling on the Canadian Government to institute sanctions against Israel. Similar statements have been made by academics in the USA, Britain, Ireland and South Africa. A number of unions, city governments, student councils, etc. around the world have also recently passed similar calls, including the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario (CFS-Ontario).

Why is CUPE Ontario involved in this as a union?

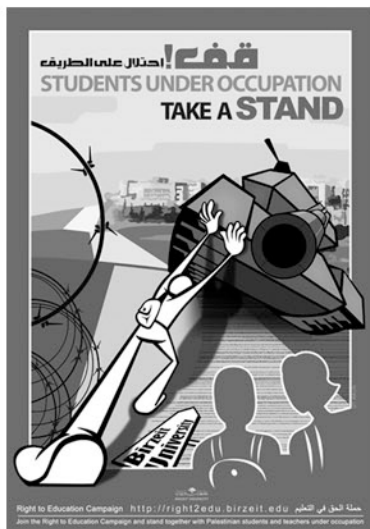
CUPE members have identified the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a priority. The current assault on Gaza, the deaths of nearly 900 Palestinians – including many children – and desperate humanitarian need call for urgent, non-violent action such as a boycott. More background information is available on the CUPE Ontario web site.

This action is a concrete measure that will help to create conditions for peace by forcing Israel to comply with international law.

The national constitution of CUPE mandates us to do international solidarity work, and CUPE has a proud history of supporting workers around the globe. Our International Solidarity Committee campaigns on international struggles for justice and workers' rights in places like Venezuela, Columbia, Egypt and Afghanistan. Here in Canada, CUPE members defend education, health and social, community and municipal services as well as human rights.

What is CUPE Ontario's plan?

The CUPE Ontario University Workers Coordinating Committee (OUWCC) will further this work by supporting a motion to boycott Israeli academic institutions, as part of the protest against the bombing assault on Gaza and, in particular, the bombing of the Islamic University on December 29, 2008.



The Right to Education Campaign poster. The R2E campaign documents the experiences of students and faculty living and teaching under occupation. There are campaign offices at Birzeit, An-Najah, and Bethlehem Universities. Several Canadian student unions have affiliated to the campaign, including the York Federation of Students and the University of Toronto at Mississauga Students' Union.

Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)

CALL FOR ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL BOYCOTT OF ISRAEL

Whereas Israel's colonial oppression of the Palestinian people, which is based on Zionist ideology, comprises the following:

- Denial of its responsibility for the Nakba -- in particular the waves of ethnic cleansing and dispossession that created the Palestinian refugee problem -- and therefore refusal to accept the inalienable rights of the refugees and displaced stipulated in and protected by international law;
- Military occupation and colonization of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza since 1967, in violation of international law and UN resolutions;
- The entrenched system of racial discrimination and segregation against the Palestinian citizens of Israel, which resembles the defunct apartheid system in South Africa;

Since Israeli academic institutions (mostly state controlled) and the vast majority of Israeli intellectuals and academics have either contributed directly to maintaining, defending or otherwise justifying the above forms of oppression, or have been complicit in them through their silence,

Given that all forms of international intervention have until now failed to force Israel to comply with international law or to end its repression of the Palestinians, which has manifested itself in many forms, including siege, indiscriminate killing, wanton destruction and the racist colonial wall,

In view of the fact that people of conscience in the international community of scholars and intellectuals have historically shouldered the moral responsibility to fight injustice, as exemplified in their struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa through diverse forms of boycott,

Recognizing that the growing international boycott movement against Israel has expressed the need for a Palestinian frame of reference outlining guiding principles,

In the spirit of international solidarity, moral consistency and resistance to injustice and oppression,

We, Palestinian academics and intellectuals, call upon our colleagues in the international community to comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions as a contribution to the struggle to end Israel's occupation, colonization and system of apartheid, by applying the following:

Refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli institutions;

Advocate a comprehensive boycott of Israeli institutions at the national and international levels, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies to these institutions;

Promote divestment and disinvestment from Israel by international academic institutions;

Work toward the condemnation of Israeli policies by pressing for resolutions to be adopted by academic, professional and cultural associations and organizations;

Support Palestinian academic and cultural institutions directly without requiring them to partner with Israeli counterparts as an explicit or implicit condition for such support.

Endorsed by:

Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees; Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions; Palestinian NGO Network, West Bank; Teachers' Federation; Palestinian Writers' Federation; Palestinian League of Artists; Palestinian Journalists' Federation; General Union of Palestinian Women; Palestinian Lawyers' Association; and tens of other Palestinian federations, associations, and civil society organizations.

PACBI, P.O. Box 1701, Ramallah, Palestine
info@BoycottIsrael.ps - <http://www.pacbi.org>



For more information, please visit

<http://www.pacbi.org>

<http://right2edu.birzeit.edu>

http://www.cupe.on.ca/doc.php?lang=en&subject_id=51