

Palestinian trade union movement forms historic BDS coalition

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The first ever [Palestinian trade union conference for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel](#) was held in Ramallah last week on 30 April. A historic formation was made at the conference with the establishment of the Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS (PTUC-BDS) — the largest coalition of the Palestinian trade union movement. According to the below statement, “PTUC-BDS will provide the most representative Palestinian reference for international trade unions, promoting their support for and endorsement of the BDS Call, launched by Palestinian civil society in 2005, guided by the guidelines and principles adopted by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC), of which PTUC-BDS has become a key component.”

Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS (PTUC-BDS)*

Statement of Principles & Call for International Trade Union Support for BDS

Occupied Palestine, 4 May 2011 – In commemoration of the first of May - a day of workers struggle and international solidarity – the first Palestinian trade union conference for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel (BDS) was held in Ramallah on 30 April 2011, organized by almost the entirety of the Palestinian trade union movement, including federations, professional unions, and trade union blocks representing the entire spectrum of Palestinian political parties. The conference marked a historic event: the formation of the Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS (PTUC-BDS) as the largest coalition of the Palestinian trade union movement. PTUC-BDS will provide the most representative Palestinian reference for international trade unions, promoting their support for and endorsement of the BDS Call, launched by Palestinian civil society in 2005, guided by the guidelines and principles adopted by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC), of which PTUC-BDS has become a key component.

The global trade union movement has always played a key and inspiring role in its courageous commitment to human rights and adoption of concrete, ground-breaking, labor-led sanctions against oppressive regimes in a show of solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world. The trade union boycott of apartheid South Africa stands out as a bright example of this tradition of effective solidarity. Trade unions today are taking the lead in defending the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination, justice, freedom, equality and the right of return of our refugees as stipulated in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194. Many of them have heeded the call from Palestinian civil society, and its labor movement in particular, to adopt BDS as the most effective form of solidarity with the Palestinians in our struggle to end Israeli occupation and apartheid.

Ending Israel’s multi-tiered system of oppression against the Palestinian people — comprising occupation, colonialism and apartheid — has become a test for humanity. For decades, Israel has enjoyed impunity while continuing its gradual ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and the Naqab (Negev) desert; its 44-year-old occupation; its theft of land and natural resources; its colonization and construction of illegal colonial settlements and walls, its siege of Gaza; its relentless denial of refugee rights; its endless wars of aggressions and incarceration of political prisoners; and its wanton killings of civilians and demolition of infrastructure. Israel’s systematic destruction of the Palestinian economy, expropriation of the most fertile agricultural land, as well as humiliation of and racist discrimination against Palestinian workers have all become part of its apartheid reality that should never be tolerated by the world today.

Given the complete failure and unwillingness of hegemonic powers to hold Israel accountable to international law, it is up to people of conscience and international civil society, especially the trade union movement, to take concrete action to end international collusion with decades of violations of international law and human rights by Israel, its institutions and international corporations.

The support of the entirety of the Palestinian trade union movement for a full boycott of Israel,[1] as the most effective form of solidarity with the Palestinian people, was the overarching message of this historic gathering.

The Conference was honored to welcome João Felício, International Relations Secretary of CUT, the Brazilian trade union representing more than 20 million workers, who expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights, and reiterated CUT’s endorsement of BDS. The conference received numerous messages of solidarity from a large number of trade union federations, including the

International Federation of Arab Trade Unions, COSATU (South Africa), ICTU (Ireland), and a large number of individual trade unions in Canada, Scotland, Italy, France, Spain, Turkey, Australia, USA and other countries. All major Palestinian political parties also enthusiastically supported the conference and the formation of PTUC-BDS.

The Conference decisively condemned the Histadrut and called on international trade unions to sever all links with it due to its historic and current complicity in Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian rights. The Histadrut has always played a key role in perpetuating Israel's occupation, colonization and system of racial discrimination by:

Publicly supporting Israel's violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention and other tenets of international law
Maintaining active commercial interests in Israel's illegal settlement enterprise[2]

Allowing Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank to join the organization[3]

Supporting Israel's war of aggression on besieged Gaza in 2008/9;[4] it has later justified Israel's massacre of humanitarian relief workers and activists aboard the Freedom Flotilla on 31 May 2010[5]

Illegally withholding over NIS 8.3 billion (approximately \$2.43bn) over decades of occupation from wages earned by Palestinian workers from the Occupied Palestinian Territory,[6] deducted for 'social and other trade union benefits' that Palestinian laborers from the OPT have never received.

Recalling the trade union maxim "an injury to one is an injury to all", and given the global trade union movement's historic role in effective international solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world, PTUC-BDS:

- Cordially salutes all global trade unions for their solidarity with the Palestinian people, especially those that have endorsed BDS against Israel,

- Calls on trade unions around the world to actively show solidarity with the Palestinian people by implementing creative and context-sensitive BDS campaigns as the most effective way to end Israeli impunity. For example by:

- o boycotting Israeli and international companies (such as Elbit, Agrexco, Veolia, Alstom, Caterpillar, Northrop Grumman, etc.) and institutions that are complicit with Israel's occupation and violations of international law,

- o reviewing pension fund investments with the purpose of divesting from Israel Bonds and all Israeli and international companies and institutions complicit in Israel's occupation, colonization and apartheid,

- o pressuring governments to suspend Free Trade Agreements, end arms trade and military relations with Israel with the intention of eventually cutting all diplomatic ties with it,

- Calls on port workers around the world to boycott loading/offloading Israeli ships, similar to the heroic step taken by port workers around the world in suspending maritime trade with South Africa in protest against the apartheid regime, and

- Calls on trade unions around the world to review and sever all ties with the Histadrut.

Such non-violent measures of accountability must continue until Israel fulfils its obligations under international law in acknowledging the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination, and fully complies with international law by:

- Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied since 1967 (including East Jerusalem), as well as dismantling of the illegal wall and colonies,

- Recognizing the fundamental right of the Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equity, as well as ending the system of racial discrimination against them, and

- Respecting, protecting and supporting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UNGA Resolution 194.

* The Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS (PTUC-BDS) is the broadest and most representative body of the Palestinian trade union movement and includes the following organisations: General Union of Palestinian Workers, Federation of Independent Trade Unions (IFU), General Union of Palestinian Women,

Union of Palestinian Professional Associations (comprising the professional syndicates of Engineers, Physicians, Pharmacists, Agricultural Engineers, Lawyers, Dentists and Veterinarians), General Union of Palestinian Teachers, General Union of Palestinian Peasants and Co-ops, General Union of Palestinian Writers, Union of Palestinian Farmers, Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUPE), Union of Public Employees in Palestine-Civil Sector; and all of the trade union blocks that make up the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU): Central Office for the Workers Movement, Progressive Labor Union Front, Workers Unity block, Progressive Workers Block, Workers solidarity organization, Workers Struggle Block, workers resistance block, Workers Liberation Front, Union of Palestinian Workers Struggle Committees, National Initiative (al-Mubadara) Block.

[1] *Despite rumors to the contrary, PGFTU's recently issued statement explicitly calls for a full boycott of Israel and of all its institutions that are complicit in the occupation:* <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2011/pgftu-clarrification-6559>

[2] <http://www.whoprofits.org/Company%20Info.php?id=889>

[3] <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10379.shtml>

[4] http://www.labourstart.org/israel/Histadrut_on_Gaza.pdf

[5] http://www.histadrut.org.il/index.php?page_id=1801

[6] <http://www.alternativenews.org/english/index.php/topics/news/2422-israel...>