



The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) is a wide coalition of the largest Palestinian mass organizations, trade unions, networks and organizations.

BNC member organizations:

Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine

Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)

Palestinian Nat'l Institute for NGOs

Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition

Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS (PTUC-BDS)

Federation of Indep. Trade Unions

Gen. Union of Palestinian Workers

Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions

Gen. Union of Palestinian Women

Union of Palestinian Farmers

Gen. Union of Palestinian Teachers

Gen. Union of Palestinian Writers

Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUE)

Union of Professional Associations

Gen. Union of Palestinian Peasants

Union of Public Employees in Palestine-Civil Sector

Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (STW)

Nat'l Committee for Grassroots Resistance

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

Nat'l Committee to Commemorate the Nakba

Civic Coalition for the Defense of Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem

Coalition for Jerusalem

Union of Pal. Charitable Organizations

Palestinian Economic Monitor

Union of Youth Activity Centers-Palestine Refugee Camps

Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Initiative

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Palestinian civil society denounces Bashar Masri's normalization with Israel as undermining the struggle for Palestinian rights

Occupied Palestine, 10 September 2012 -- The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC), the largest coalition in Palestinian civil society that includes Palestinian political parties, unions, NGOs and grassroots organisations and leads the global BDS movement, strongly condemns the participation of Palestinian businessman Bashar Masri in the Israeli High Tech Industry Association (HTIA) annual conference taking place between the 10th and 12th of September in Haifa and Jerusalem.¹ Other speakers to the conference include Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Nir Barakat, the Israeli mayor of occupied Jerusalem. Masri will be speaking at a panel with Israeli businessman in a conference that is supported by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among other Israeli state bodies. Masri's participation in this conference constitutes an act of normalization with Israel that helps it whitewash its ongoing occupation, colonization and apartheid against the Palestinian people and that undermines the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and self determination.

The institutions and individuals at the helm of this propaganda conference that aims to promote Israel to the world as a "high-tech haven" are active participants in the oppression of Palestinians and persistent violators of international law. Israel's high-tech industry is a major partner of the Israeli military-security complex and depends on it for its growth and success.² Exports from the Israeli high-tech industry help sustain the military budget.³ It is therefore unsurprising that the conference enjoys the full backing of Israel's ruling elite with the high-tech industry accounting for one-third of Israel's GDP and constituting a key pillar to Israel's hegemony in the region.⁴

The symbiotic relationship between Israel's high-tech industry and military complex is built in part on the back of Palestinians since Israel uses its military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to battle-test, or field-test, its technological advances and invest that in promoting its international military sales. In one such instance, Amnesty International found evidence of victims dying of unusual wounds during Israel's 2008/9 assault on Gaza due to use of unspecified new weapons.⁵ This practice provides the starkest example of Israel profiting directly from the lives of Palestinians, which Israel makes no secret in considering dispensable and of inferior value.⁶ All this has led the BNC to call for a comprehensive military embargo on Israel⁷, including on high-tech companies that are complicit in its violations of international law.

Masri's support for this conference despite the public nature of these facts constitutes a shameless act of normalization of the worst type that trivializes the sacrifice of those Palestinians that on a daily basis struggle to defend their rights and dignity. These include the Palestinian

prisoners currently risking their lives on hunger strike in Israeli jails and Jerusalemites who are facing a vicious and escalating Israeli campaign of ethnic cleansing advanced by the apartheid Jerusalem Municipality of Nir Barakat.

To make matters worse, this year's HTIA conference will commemorate the centennial of Israel's Technion University, an institution that plays an active role in the dispossession of Palestinians. To cite just one example among many⁸, Technion has led in the development of the armoured Caterpillar-manufactured D9 remote-controlled bulldozer used by the Israeli military to demolish Palestinian houses. Technion is target of an international boycott called for by Palestinian academics⁹ and international solidarity groups in Canada¹⁰ and the US¹¹, among other countries. It is disconcerting to see a Palestinian breaking the boycott, as Masri is deliberately doing, when hundreds of academics worldwide have adhered to it as an act of principled solidarity and have even put their careers on the line to stand up to its detractors.

Bashar Masri's commitment to this conference is not out of line with his other dealings with Israel in subversion of the Palestinian-led global BDS campaign to isolate Israel, an effort that has enjoyed unprecedented success worldwide and constitutes one of the most effective tools Palestinians have for accountability and justice in the face of growing Israeli criminality and impunity. Contrary to Masri's claims to be working for "building Palestine" through his business dealings, his actions have in fact been more in harmony with Israel's declared policy of "economic peace" for the West Bank, that is, the sidelining of basic Palestinian rights, including the right to self determination of all Palestinians, in favour of economic gains for an elite minority, part of Israel's carrot and stick approach that rewards obedience to Israeli dictates.¹² The failure of this policy, spearheaded by Netanyahu, has manifested itself in the abject poverty, growing malnutrition, and joblessness that have prevailed among Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the besieged Gaza Strip and the so-called Area C of the West Bank, controlled by Israel.

Bashar al-Masri has been an active supporter and participant in the Israeli-Palestinian Chamber of Commerce (IPCC), an Israeli-established and controlled body based in Tel Aviv designed to advance the economic exploitation of Palestinians and Palestinian resources under occupation. One of the stated goals of the IPCC is to provide business intelligence and facilitate deals for Israeli businessmen in the Palestinian market.¹³ The organization is headed by Israeli Lt. Col (ret) Avi Nudelman, an Israeli military official who spent most of his career in the intelligence apparatus or as a high-level commander for the Israeli military.¹⁴ Masri participated in the opening gala of the IPCC and lectured before its [Israeli] members at least once about the prospects of investing in the Palestinian economy. According to Masri himself, "Israeli businessmen come to me time and time again seeking help in entering the Palestinian market and the Arab world."¹⁵

The BNC had publicly condemned this blatant economic normalization, in particular through the construction of the planned city of Rawabi, north of Ramallah, as news became known that Israeli companies were "invited" to bid for contracts.¹⁶ More recently, Masri was quoted as warmly inviting Israelis themselves to "buy apartments" in Rawabi.¹⁷ Indeed, in 2009 there was outrage when Bayti Real Estate, which Masri jointly owns with the Qatari Diar group, had accepted a donation of trees for Rawabi from the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the Zionist entity that "pioneered" the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians since before the 1948 Nakba and is now involved in an effort to displace thousands of Palestinian citizens of Israel from the Naqab.¹⁸ The trees had remained in place months after Masri had committed to replace them in response to public pressure.¹⁹

To conceive Rawabi, Masri sought the services of Israeli architect Moshe Safdie, who reportedly took Masri on a tour of one of his projects, the planned city of Modi'in.²⁰ Part of the Modi'in complex is in fact a West Bank settlement, Modi'in Illit, illegally built on the lands of the village of Bil'in for which weekly protests are organized at the cost of violent Israeli repression. Safdie, who is a main architect of an illegal Jewish settlement in the Old City of Jerusalem²¹, has also conceived the design for the Mamilla Mall in the eastern part of occupied Jerusalem and owns a house built over property belonging to Palestinians as a settler in the Old City.²²

Masri was in the news last year as a bidder for the financially troubled illegal Israeli settlement of Nof Zion, built in the middle of the Palestinian neighborhood of Jabal Mukabber in the eastern part of occupied Jerusalem.²³ For both of these endeavors, Rawabi and Nof Zion, Masri hired the services of his counterpart, businessman Dov Weisglass, Ariel Sharon's former advisor, widely quoted for his summing up of Israel's siege of Gaza. Weisglass said, "the idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger."²⁴ This policy has been confirmed in practice through a court petition whereby Israel counted minimum calories each Palestinian in Gaza was entitled to.²⁵ That Masri would partner with someone accused of complicity in war crimes against the Palestinian people to forward his business interests is inexcusable.

More recently Masri entered into partnership with Maurice Levy, the French Zionist owner of the multinational advertising corporation Publicis. Levy purchased a stake at Masri's firm - Zoom Advertising - and acquired at the same time the Israeli ad agency BBR group, in effect merging the two. With this move, Levy declared his intention of building peace "through strong economies."²⁶ As is typical in the discourse of so-called "liberal Zionists," Levy never mentioned Palestinian rights or Israel's role in denying them. One of Levy's "peace" projects includes a partnership with the Peres Center for Peace to get Israelis and Palestinians to donate blood to each other, presumably to bring both sides closer together, a particularly detestable idea given Israeli apartheid policies and the scope of Israel's killing and injuring of Palestinians on a daily basis.²⁷

Last June, Masri participated as a speaker in the Israeli Presidential Conference, an event "inspired by the vision of the President of the State of Israel Shimon Peres".²⁸ This "vision" could have been the development of Israel's nuclear weapons program for which Peres is credited²⁹ or the Qana massacre in 1996 that killed 102 Lebanese civilians seeking refuge at a UN building³⁰. Peres is one of Israel's "demographic threat" soothsayers, warning against the threat of Palestinian babies to the Jewish character of Israel. Despite this, Masri is known to maintain open relations of cordiality not just with numerous Israeli businessmen³¹ but with Peres himself.³²

Other normalization initiatives conducted through the auspices of Masri's multi-million dollar business ventures include efforts to take Palestinian farmers to learn from Israelis "desert farming techniques".³³ With Israel appropriating almost 90 per cent of the water from the West Bank, these initiatives could be seen as teaching Palestinians to adapt to Israeli occupation instead of challenging these illegal measures.³⁴

These are just a few of Masri's dealings with Israeli political and business elite as a means to advance personal interests and profit making at the expense of Palestinian rights. The achievements and continuing growth of the Palestinian-led BDS movement worldwide in raising the price of Israel's occupation, colonization and apartheid and refocusing on the comprehensive, UN-sanctioned rights of all Palestinians, including of the millions of refugees who are denied their right to return, have necessitated an honest commitment to the principles of the Palestinian cause

over which a national consensus is built upon. The fact that Palestinians are now taking to the streets protesting economic policies is testament to the failed model advanced by Masri and promoted by Israel.

The demand is clear: Bashar Masri and his companies must end all normalization activities with Israel and its complicit institutions, beyond the bare necessity that all Palestinian businesses in the occupied territory must reckon with. Palestinian civil society has always stood -- almost unanimously -- behind boycotting normalizing businesses and institutions. We call for civil, peaceful, morally-consistent accountability measures against Masri's businesses, especially Rawabi, and all other Palestinian businesses proven to be involved in undermining our struggle for our inalienable rights.

BDS National Committee (BNC)

¹ <http://events.eventact.com/oscar/htia2/tentative-program-12.08.pdf>

² <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts%20About%20Israel/Science%20-%20Technology/The%20Israel%20High-Tech%20Industry%20-%20Fifty%20Years%20of%20Exc>

³ <http://www.globes.co.il/serveen/globes/docview.asp?did=258771&fid=954>

⁴ <http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/221/israels-high-tech-boom>

⁵ http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=18032

⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/07/israeli-school-racism-claim> or <http://mondoweiss.net/2010/11/israeli-state-violence-and-the-value-of-palestinian-life.html>

⁷ <http://www.bdsmovement.net/activecamps/military-embargo>

⁸ <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1786>

⁹ <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=869>

¹⁰ <http://www.tadamon.ca/post/8105>

¹¹ <http://www.usacbi.org/stop-technioncornell-collaboration/>

¹² <http://electronicintifada.net/content/netanyahu-fayyad-economic-peace-one-year/8673>

¹³ http://www.ipcc.org.il/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=7&Itemid=29

¹⁴ http://www.ipcc.org.il/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=16&Itemid=65

¹⁵ <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4010020,00.html>

¹⁶ <http://electronicintifada.net/content/role-israeli-firms-raises-boycott-concerns-about-rawabi/9162>

¹⁷ <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4181368,00.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.stopthejnf.org/about.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2011/davis-rawabi-5931>

²⁰ <http://www.jpost.com/LandedPages/PrintArticle.aspx?id=161816>

²¹ <http://www.tau.ac.il/~gallery/SAFDIE/beg.html>

²² <http://www.ericriblin.com/pages/politics/jerusalem.html>

²³ <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4109560,00.html>

²⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/apr/16/israel>

²⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8654337.stm>

²⁶ <http://www.jta.org/news/article/2012/06/19/3098506/french-jewish-advertiser-enters-israeli-and-palestinian-markets>

²⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/19/technology/19iht-publicis19.html>

²⁸ <http://www.presidentconf.org.il/2011/en/subjects2012.asp>

²⁹ <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/c/cohen-israel.html>

³⁰ <http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2006/dec/05/peres-history-contradicts-his-peaceful-image/>

³¹ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/dream-of-a-palestinian-tiger-boom-times-in-the-west-bank-a-759046.html>

³² <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4010020,00.html>

³³ <http://www.jpost.com/Sci-Tech/Article.aspx?id=255193>

³⁴ http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=18466