

Palestinian civil society salutes Olympia Food Co-op's decision to boycott Israeli goods!

Occupied Palestine, 26 July 2010 – Palestinian farmers unions, agricultural organizations and popular committees struggling against Israel's colonial Wall and settlements warmly salute the historic decision taken on July 15th [1] by the Olympia Food Co-op to remove all Israeli products from its shelves. The Olympia Food Co-op has set a historic precedent by becoming the first US grocery store to publicly join the global grassroots campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it ends its human rights violations and oppression of the Palestinian people. Coming a few short weeks after Israel's lethal attack on the Freedom Flotilla and in light of its ongoing illegal siege on Gaza, the Co-op's decision to boycott all Israeli products reflects the growing sentiment in international civil society, including in the US, that ending Israel's impunity and pressuring it to comply with its obligations under international law have become of undeniable urgency [2].

Through its ever growing colonial settlements, the Wall and hundreds of military checkpoints in the occupied Palestinian territory, Israel has systematically dispossessed Palestinians of their most fertile lands or separated them from them, expropriated the most important water aquifers and denied millions of Palestinians the right to move or trade freely, thereby rendering development impossible and stifling the growth of Palestinian agriculture in particular.

Not only so, but Israel's illegal Wall, settlements and military zones have confiscated and/or restricted Palestinian use of most of the land in the occupied West Bank. Israeli checkpoints and Jewish settler roads have dissected the West Bank and turned Palestinian cities and villages into Bantustans isolated in effect from one another. Trucks shipping Palestinian produce are constantly subjected to long hours of "security" checks and other bureaucratic measures to obstruct their timely access to markets, while Israeli produce is allowed to pass freely. Currently, 266,442 Palestinians in 78 communities are forced to abandon their homes as a result of mass demolition orders, as well as being entirely isolated by the Wall [3]. This is in addition to Palestinian refugees who were forcibly displaced from their lands in the 1948 Nakba -- and ever since -- and have been denied by Israel their UN-sanctioned right to return to these lands, perpetuating their dispossession and miserable living conditions.

Israel's lethal siege on Gaza has almost completely destroyed the agricultural sector there. As of June 2009, a total of 46% of agricultural land in the Gaza Strip was assessed to be inaccessible or out of production owing to Israel's wanton destruction of these fertile lands during its war of aggression on Gaza in 2008-2009 or its marking of large agricultural areas as "security buffer zones." [4] Moreover, water resources in Gaza are critically insufficient, mainly due to Israel's destruction of infrastructure during its Gaza attack, forcing farmers to use salty and polluted water from agricultural wells for irrigation. This and the fact that 90-95% of the Gaza water supply has become polluted to the extent that is not suitable for human consumption have caused major health problems to Gaza's population, especially among children and other vulnerable sectors of society [5]. While the agricultural sector in Gaza has the potential to export 2300 tons of strawberries, 55 million carnation flowers and 714 tons of cherry tomatoes per annum, there has been close to zero export activity in Gaza as a result of Israel's blockade. Even with such high agricultural potential, Israel's lethal siege has left the people of Gaza with a 61% prevalence of household food insecurity [6].

The destruction of Palestinian livelihoods and the denial of supply of essential goods to Gaza are not a side effect, but rather a tool consciously used by Israeli policy makers. In fact, the siege of Gaza is “a central pillar”[7] of the Israeli policy. Dov Weissglass, top political advisor to former Israeli prime ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert stated that "the idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet but not to make them die of hunger"[8].

While Israel continues to ravage Palestinian livelihoods with full impunity the Olympia Food Co-op’s decision to boycott Israeli products presents a moral, effective and timely response that promises, if emulated across the US, to significantly challenge Israel’s criminal impunity, furthering the chances for respect for human rights and a measure of justice for the Palestinians.

The Palestinian-led global BDS movement, which is inspired by the South African anti-apartheid struggle and the U.S. civil rights movement, has proven over the past five years of its existence that it is the most effective way to gradually and consistently mobilize concerted international civil society efforts to support the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and sustainable peace [9]. This can only be achieved by compelling Israel to end its occupation, apartheid, and persistent denial of the right of return for the Palestinian refugees.

The Olympia Food Co-op has demonstrated its courage and commitment to human rights by adopting a concrete and courageous measure in a show of genuine solidarity with the indigenous Palestinian people. We sincerely hope that their decision to stand with justice will not waver under the immense intimidation and bullying that Israel lobby groups will undoubtedly unleash against them. We believe that the most effective support conscientious individuals and groups across the U.S. can provide to the Olympia Co-op is by starting their own local BDS campaigns that follow Olympia’s lead, branding Israeli products and services everywhere as stained with injustice and war crimes, just as South African products were treated during apartheid . Only thus can justice prevail and peace be attained and sustained.

Endorsed by:

General Union of Palestinian Peasants and Co-op Groups

Union of Palestinian Farmers

Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (STW)

National Committee for Popular Resistance

Popular Committees against the Wall and settlements in Nil’in, Bil’in, Al-Maasara, Nabi Saleh, Budros, Beit Jala and Wadi Rahal

Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees

Union of Palestinian Agricultural Engineers

Union of Agricultural Work Committees

[1] <http://www.olympiabds.org/2010/olympia-food-co-op-removes-israeli-goods-from-shelves-first-us-store-to-institute-boycott.html>

[2] For more information, see the Palestinian BDS National Committee’s statement underlining the urgency of intensifying BDS after Israel’s attack on the Flotilla: <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/728>

[3] Factsheet: Threatened Villages - Palestinian population centres between isolation and expulsion, <http://stopthewall.org/factsheets/1632.shtml>

[4] OCHA report: <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MDCS-85SHU3?OpenDocument&rc=3&cc=pse>

[5] Amnesty international report: www.amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_19771.pdf

[6] OCHA report: <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/MDCS-85SHU3?OpenDocument&rc=3&cc=pse>

[7] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8654337.stm

[8] <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article9276.shtml> Dov Weissglass was advisor to Israeli prime ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert.

[9] BNC statement celebrating 5 years of BDS: <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/755>