

**First Palestinian Conference for the Boycott of Israel (BDS)
22 November 2007
Al-Bireh, Ramallah**

Summary Report

“The Campaign for the Boycott of Israel will re-vitalize popular resistance and restore dignity to the Palestinian people”

An important mile-stone in building the global BDS campaign was achieved in Ramallah on 22 November 2007. Some 300 activists, members of unions, associations and NGOs in towns, villages and refugee camps of the occupied West Bank, with monitors from the global solidarity movement in Britain, Canada, Norway, Spain and South Africa, convened for a day of discussion and debate about ways to promote all forms of boycott against Israel among Palestinian community organizations, unions, as well as political, academic and cultural institutions. Organizers and participants left the conference with a sense of accomplishment: practical recommendations are in place for building the popular Palestinian BDS campaign as a strategic form of civil resistance in the long struggle ahead against Israel's regime of apartheid over the Palestinian people.

The conference was opened by Dr. Gabi Baramki (PACBI) who reminded participants of the fact that boycott has been a tool of the Palestinian struggle since the 1920s. He stated that the power of popular boycott derived from international law and universal ethical principles, and emphasized the timeliness of a Palestinian popular boycott movement, especially now, when isolation and fragmentation are imposed more than ever on the Palestinian people, in order to bring about loss of hope, dignity and surrender. Boycott and popular struggle contributed to the liberation of India and South Africa, he stated, adding that, while it is true that the challenge for Palestinians is bigger, because South Africa never enjoyed the level of support Israel has from the United States and Europe, the Palestinian boycott campaign can be effective because of Israel's ultimate dependence, politically, diplomatically and economically, on the West.

Representing PNGO, Dr. Allam Jarrar then summarized the need for boycott in the current political context, asserting that “The Palestinian struggle is a struggle against the systematic effort by Israel to replace one people in the country by another.” He affirmed that the conference was a historic event, “because 60 years into the Palestinian Nakba, we are beginning to revise the strategy of our struggle for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among them our rights to self-determination, independence and return [for refugees]. The boycott campaign will re-vitalize popular resistance and restore dignity.” He presented several motivating factors for the BDS campaign:

- it dispels the myth that negotiations with Israel are the only form of struggle that Palestinians can engage in;
- as a non-violent tool, it is a form of popular resistance that can appeal to all Palestinians, in the homeland and exile, as well as to global supporters;
- it is a tool for rebuilding collective struggle and unity;
- it revives national culture and identity, and can give hope and inspiration to the young generation;
- it challenges the current balance of power through applying sustained and effective pressure on Israel.

The first session included presentations – followed by discussion - by two guest speakers. Virginia Setshedi, from the Palestine Solidarity Committee in South Africa, reminded the audience of the fact that Apartheid is a crime against humanity, and explained that the new, post-Apartheid South African social movement understands the struggle of the Palestinian people. At the time of the

2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, a commitment was made to support the Palestinian struggle to isolate Apartheid Israel, she said. The social movement in South Africa, which welcomed the 2005 Palestinian civil society BDS call as an appeal by the Palestinian people to launch this joint struggle, has worked ever since on building the BDS movement in South Africa -- shaming the South African government and pressuring it to rescind normal relations with Israel, and boycotting Israeli consumer products. She emphasized the importance of solidarity to be mutual and encouraged Palestinians to express their support for the people's struggle in post-Apartheid South Africa for economic and social justice.

Prof. Haim Bresheeth, of the British Committee for Universities of Palestine (BRICUP), gave a personal account of how a state visit to Israel in 1972 by the prime minister of the South African regime made him aware of the affinity between Apartheid and Israel's Zionist regime. He emphasized the need for a profound analysis not only of Zionist Israel's strengths, but also of the failures of Israel's regime, as a system that can cause massive destruction but is unable to provide solutions to Jews, to the Palestinian people, or to the people in the region.

Speakers in the second session set the agenda for the subsequent discussions in the workshops, examining how to promote boycott as a key component in the struggle by all sectors of Palestinian civil society and the criteria, programs and mechanisms needed to guide the Palestinian and global boycott campaign. Based on a review of joint Israeli-Palestinian civil society projects ("people to people" projects) in the fields of gender, youth and efforts at "building a joint historical narrative," Dr. Islah Jad of PACBI showed how such projects have undermined Palestinian identity and struggle for freedom by giving the false impression of "balance" and of the possibility of reaching a "middle-ground" between the oppressor and the oppressed, rather than ending oppression altogether. As western donors continue to encourage such projects, she said, every Palestinian is responsible to undertake, before engagement, a close examination based on the criteria developed by the BDS campaign.

Adnan Ateyah, speaking for OPGAI, explained the criteria for the BDS campaign and emphasized the strategic character of this campaign which aims not only to end the military occupation in place since 1967, but also to challenge Israel's ideology, Zionism, and its international relations. Jamal Jum'a of the Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign pointed out that boycott is an effective tool in supporting Palestinian farmers and the building of a Palestinian economy of steadfastness on the land as opposed to grandiose "development projects" that effectively entrench dependency on the occupation. He stressed the need to unify the political analysis, terminology and campaigns, and to promote the BDS campaign at a national level. Opposition to normalization has to be a crucial element of the campaign, he stated, in order to strengthen Palestinian cohesion and give a signal to the people and the leadership. Globally, Jum'a added, the BDS movement has become today so widespread and diversified that it is beyond the capacity of the Zionist lobby to destroy it; only Palestinian normalization can do so.

Recommendations (from the three, parallel workshops)

There was consensus among participants that building civil resistance is a priority in the current era. Work on the Palestinian BDS Campaign should be seen in this context and lead to the formation of an inclusive Steering Committee for the Campaign.

Additional recommendations included:

1. For the local Palestinian BDS Campaign

General: Palestinian employment in Jewish settlements and Israel is to be excluded from the

boycott, because it is a source of necessary income that has no current substitute.

Consumer Boycott

- Study Israeli products in the Palestinian market: What are they? Where are they distributed? How do they enter?
- Identify products which have Palestinian (or other) alternatives and mobilize for massive consumer boycotts against them;
- Mobilize pressure to prevent entry of Israeli products (e.g. put up boxes for public complaints) where local alternatives exist;
- Start dialogue with Palestinian companies about ways to support Palestinian national products and expand employment of the Palestinian work force.

Education

- Undertake a review of the Palestinian curriculum to ensure historical accuracy;
- Raise awareness and work with students at schools and universities to spread the culture of boycott;
- Request from the Ministry of Education to urge private schools to stop selling Israeli products (in the cafeterias) and not to engage in normalization projects with Israeli organizations.

Media and Public Awareness-Raising

- Pressure Palestinian media to halt all advertisement of Israeli products;
- Organize public awareness campaigns (posters, stickers, etc.) about boycott, and request support from the local media.

Mechanisms for Campaign Building and Promotion

- Form popular boycott committees in all regions and sectors in order to: build public awareness about the importance of the campaign and the criteria for boycott and anti-normalization; initiate action and build a popular culture of boycott; and develop a response to those insisting on normalization;
- Build pressure on PA officials for ending normalization with Israel (end security coordination, rescind Paris Protocol on economic cooperation, etc.);
- Express Palestinian support for struggles in the “global south” (e.g., Africa, South America, Asia), in order to build mutual support.

2. For the Campaign in the Arab World

- Seek cooperation and coordination with anti-normalization committees in the Arab world;
- Lobby for re-activation of the Arab-League boycott committee;
- Raise the profile of BDS in the mainstream Arab media;
- Encourage Arab investors to invest in the Palestinian economy;
- Promote Palestinian products in Arab countries.

3. For the International/Global Campaign

Strategy and Message

- Emphasize that the BDS campaign does not only target Israel's economy, but challenges Israel's legitimacy, being a colonial and apartheid state, as part of the international community. Therefore, efforts are needed not only to promote wide consumer boycotts, but also boycotts in the fields of academia, culture and sports;
- The Nakba-60 campaign in 2008 is a campaign for the boycott of Israel, including calling for a boycott of the “Israel at 60” celebrations.

Targets

- Select boycott targets that provide an opportunity for public education about Israel's apartheid regime.

Alliances

As work with the major (potential) allies (e.g., unions, faith-based organizations/churches, political parties) continues, give special attention to:

- Palestinian and other Arab media correspondents in the respective countries: brief them about BDS initiatives and encourage them to report them to audiences in Palestine and the Arab world;
- Support other struggles in the “global south” and struggles of marginalized communities in the “north,” and encourage links with the global BDS campaign;

Coordination

- For the time being, use existing websites (e.g. PACBI) and lists to update about and coordinate global activities and campaigns, until a centralized BDS website can take over that role;
- For the time being, the International Coordinating Network on Palestine (ICNP) serves as (symbolic, temporary) network for coordination of the global BDS campaign;
- Participants recommend a special BDS organizers conference to be held in November 2008, in order to formalize and improve the mechanism of global coordination.

The conference was convened by the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), the OPGAI-Coalition, PACBI and the Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign. The organizing committee expresses its special thanks to Muwatin, The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, OPGAI-Occupied Palestine and Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative, BADIL Resource Center, PMRS-Palestinian Medical Relief Society, UHWC-Union of Health Work Committees, UAWC-Union of Agricultural Relief Work Committees who made this conference possible. Thanks also go to Watan TV for coverage, media dissemination, and providing volunteers who assisted with logistics.

This report was prepared by the Conference Steering Committee.

For review and endorsement of the 2005 Palestinian BDS Call, see: www.bds-palestine.net