



**Boycott
Divestment
Sanctions**

Palestinian civil society condemns repression in Canada against Palestine solidarity campaigns and humanitarian efforts

May 26, 2010

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

Member organizations:

- Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine
- Gen. Union of Palestinian Workers
- Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions
- Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)
- Palestinian Nat'l Institute for NGOs
- Federation of Indep. Trade Unions
- Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition
- Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Initiative
- Gen. Union of Palestinian Women
- Union of Palestinian Farmers
- 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
- Union of Professional Associations

Occupied Palestine – The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC), strongly condemns the actions taken by Canadian state bodies, university administrations and pressure groups to defund, repress and otherwise attempt to weaken groups and individuals that provide assistance to, or campaign in solidarity with, Palestinians. Such blatantly anti-democratic measures are not only repulsive per se; they are forms of complicity with Israeli violations of international law and Palestinian rights and have far reaching adverse consequences for civil liberties. The BNC believes that this repression in Canada must be brought to an end.

The BNC is deeply troubled by the politically suspect and professionally unjustifiable defunding of organisations that advocate Palestinian rights and organise humanitarian efforts on behalf of Palestinians. In December 2009, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) cut funding to KAIROS, a faith-based human rights organisation it had funded for the previous 35 years¹. This cut was a direct consequence of the KAIROS's promotion of Palestinian human rights. The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)², who provide assistance to 5 million Palestinian refugees, and the Al Haq and Al Mezan human rights organisations³ have all been victims of Canadian funding cuts. The Canadian Arab Foundation (CAF) also had its funding cut⁴ following its outspoken criticism of the failure of the Canadian government to speak out against Israel's atrocities in Gaza, described in the UN Goldstone report as "war crimes".

Attacks on Palestine solidarity activism have become commonplace in Canadian universities. Student and faculty groups that highlight the apartheid nature of the legalized Israeli system of racial discrimination and work to bolster the emerging Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement have been targeted with aggressive bureaucratic delays and obstacles, the arbitrary charging of security fees, and outright banning of their activities.

At the centre of this battle on Canadian campuses is Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW), a global series of campus-based events that seeks to educate about Israel's system of discrimination and its conformity to the UN definition of the crime of apartheid. IAW began in Toronto in 2005, and since then its organizers have significantly suffered from repression and censorship tactics befitting institutions under totalitarian regimes⁵. Prior to the 2009 IAW, Carleton University banned the posters that were being used to promote the Week's events, citing concerns that the posters might incite students to "infringe rights protected in the Ontario Human Rights Code"⁶. Three other universities followed suit. In March of this year, Laurentian University censored the announcement of IAW. At the federal government level, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Jason Kenney⁷ and Leader of the Opposition

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Michael Ignatieff⁸ joined the smearing campaign against the IAW. Although similar motions failed to pass in the federal Parliament and in the province of Manitoba, the Ontario government passed a non-binding private member's bill condemning IAW in March 2010⁹.

Another admirable example of activism continuing in the face of well-organised and well-funded attempts at censorship is to be found within the Canadian labour movement. The President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) in Ontario received death threats and was the target of a vicious smear campaign, described as "tantamount to a new form of McCarthyism" after the union had overwhelmingly endorsed the Palestinian civil society call for a campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel until it complies with international law. The state authorities did little to stem the vicious campaign.¹⁰

The most recent example of the repression that Canadian activists face concerns the Toronto-based group Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA). Bowing to pressure from the Israel lobby and their allies at the Toronto City Council who threatened to cut Pride's funding over QuAIA's participation, Pride Toronto has banned QuAIA from 2010 Pride Week events.¹¹ The interference by the City and the subsequent banning of a group from Pride is unprecedented. The BNC deplors the attempt by politicians to infringe fundamental freedoms so as to protect Israel from a legitimate, not to mention accurate, analysis of its crimes and human rights violations. The most basic democratic principle of freedom of expression seems to be trampled upon in Canada when Israel is the target of this expression.

Other worrying developments in this context of repression include the decision taken by the Koffler Centre of the Arts to disassociate artist Reena Katz for her activities with Israeli Apartheid Week¹² and the pressure faced by the Toronto District School Board to remove from school reading lists *The Shepherd's Granddaughter*, a book told from the perspective of a Palestinian girl whose family land is destroyed by an Israeli settler¹³.

Perhaps the most high-level and coordinated attack on Palestine solidarity in Canada is the self-appointed Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism (CPCCA), which deceptively conflates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Based on this definition of anti-Semitism, CPCCA has set out to eliminate all criticism of Israel in Canada. The group has no official mandate from the Canadian parliament, but held a series of hearings in late 2009 and early 2010. Moreover, without any public discussion, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada will be co-hosting the second international conference of the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism (ICCA) in Ottawa in November 2010.

This deep complicity of the Canadian government in supporting and protecting from scrutiny the Israeli apartheid state is discussed at length in a soon to be released report by the Palestine Freedom of Expression campaign. The report exposes the CPCCA's undemocratic, biased and problematic attempts to shield Israel from legitimate criticism that is allowed against any other state committing similar crimes and violations of international law.¹⁴

It is not surprising that government officials and some university administrations in Canada have chosen to hone in on the use of the term "Israeli apartheid". They would prefer to outlaw the term rather than engaging the facts, perhaps because doing so would lead them to the same conclusions of international law experts, scores of civil society organisations and Archbishop Desmond Tutu who argue that the label is an accurate one, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. The apartheid framing of the Israeli regime is long standing; in 2009, a 302-page legal study overseen by Prof. John Dugard, a former UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territory,

concluded that “the State of Israel exercises control over the Occupied Palestinian Territories with the purpose of maintaining a system of domination by Jews over Palestinians and that this system constitutes a breach of the [UN] prohibition of apartheid”.¹⁵

The actions of Canadian state bodies, universities and the CPCCA to erase Israeli apartheid from public discourse, defund organisations that provide vital support to Palestinians, and shield Israel from criticism reduce the possibilities of a just and lasting peace, present a serious threat to freedom of expression, and bolsters Israel’s impunity in violating human rights. The failure thus far of Canadian state authorities and public bodies to hold Israel to account for its violation of international law and Palestinian rights is, furthermore, a violation of Canada's obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice against Israel's Wall and colonial settlements. The active suppression of Canadian organizations that work to promote Israel's accountability before international law is beyond reproach.

The BNC therefore calls upon the Canadian government and public bodies to:

- Safeguard freedom of expression of Canadian citizens and civil society organizations with regards to discussion of Palestinian rights and Israeli policies;
- Reject the CPCCA’s deceptive and unfounded conflation of criticism of Israel or of Zionism with anti-Semitism;
- Bring the CPCCA within the realm of public and democratic accountability;
- Refrain from using public funding as a weapon to ban Queers Against Israeli Apartheid from participation in Pride Week events;
- Reinstate all funding cut on biased political grounds from human rights and community-based organizations.

And on individuals, groups and organizations of conscience to:

- Lobby the Canadian Parliament and public bodies to take the aforementioned steps by lifting all censorship and other repressive measures;
- Express solidarity with and support for freedom of expression by signing the Palestine Freedom of Expression Declaration posted on the website at www.freeexpressionpalestine.org/. To endorse the declaration, send an e-mail to pfex@freeexpressionpalestine.org
- Send solidarity messages to Queers Against Israeli Apartheid quaia.toronto@gmail.com
- Disseminate information about the repression in Canada against civil society groups.

It is the height of double standard for the Canadian government to advocate democracy and respect for freedoms elsewhere while suppressing freedoms and undermining democracy at home for political convenience. Palestinian civil society, represented in the BNC, condemns all repression, perpetrated by any party, including by governments that are ostensibly “democratic”.

- The BNC Secretariat

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- 1 <http://www.kairoscanada.org/en/who-we-are/cida-funding-cuts/>
 - 2 <http://www.thestar.com/living/article/750917--canada-redirects-funding-for-un-relief-agency>
 - 3 <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/fullcomment/archive/2010/01/20/aurel-braun-jacques-gauthier-brad-farquhar-elliott-tepper-david-matas-marco-navarro-g-233-nie-and-michael-van-pelt-committed-to-accountability-and-oversight.aspx>
 - 4 <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/fullcomment/archive/2009/02/26/khaled-mouammar-the-canadian-arab-federation-responds.aspx>
 - 5 <http://www.rabble.ca/news/exposed-university-toronto-suppressed-pro-palestinian-activism>
 - 6 <http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/594497>
 - 7 <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/opinions/article974960.ece>
 - 8 <http://network.nationalpost.com/NP/blogs/fullcomment/archive/2010/03/01/ignatieff-condemns-israel-apartheid-week.aspx>
 - 9 <http://www.thestar.com/news/ontario/article/771761--mpps-decry-linking-israel-to-apartheid>
 - 10 http://cupe.ca/communications/Sid_Ryan_confronts_a
 - 11 <http://queersagainstapartheid.org/2010/05/10/will-city-council-follow-harpers-lead-by-cutting-pride-funding/>
 - 12 <http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/article/631984>
 - 13 <http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/education/article/800159--author-defends-the-shepherd-s-granddaughter?bn=1>
 - 14 <http://www.freeexpressionpalestine.org/>
 - 15 Middle East Project of the Democracy and Governance Programme, Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (May 2009), Occupation, Colonialism, Apartheid? A re-assessment of Israel's practices in the occupied Palestinian territories under international law, pp. 17–22, <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Document-3227.phtml>,