

**July 9, 2010**

**Time for Action: A Response to Israeli Violations of International Law, issued on the 5th Anniversary of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign**

*A Joint Statement of the BDS working group of Faculty for Palestine (F4P, Toronto) and College and University Workers United (CUWU, Montreal)*

The Israeli attack on a humanitarian aid convoy to Gaza on May 31, 2010 confirms once again Israel's pattern of disregard for international law. This pattern was brutally demonstrated during the assault on Gaza in December 2008-January 2009, which killed over 1400 Palestinians. Other flagrant violations of international law by the Israeli state include: the construction of the Wall, the ongoing occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, the ever-increasing construction of illegal settlements in these occupied territories and the failure, since 1948, to recognize Palestinian refugees' right of return.

We believe it is time to take action to end Israel's serial violation of international law. We believe it is time to begin a sustained action campaign to support the 170 Palestinian civil society organizations that, in 2005, called for campaigns of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) to pressure Israel to both recognize the basic rights of the Palestinian people and to obey the requirements of international law.

With this joint statement we mark the 5th Anniversary of the BDS campaign by publicly announcing our adherence and commitment to the BDS call. As university and college faculty and workers, we begin the first stage of our action campaign with a focus on divestment and on breaking institutional ties between Canadian and Israeli academic institutions.

University faculty around the globe are increasingly responding to the call for a boycott of academic institutions complicit with the Israeli state. Faculty and worker-led BDS initiatives are rapidly taking new ground on campuses, building solidarity with students and campus workers in divestment campaigns like those at University of California, Berkeley and Hampshire College, Massachusetts. In addition to prominent individual academics like Judith Butler recently announcing support for BDS, important boycott actions of Israeli academic institutions are emerging. In February 2010 five hundred academics from around the world signed a petition calling for the boycott of the International Geographical Union's Regional Conference in Tel Aviv. As well, new sites of faculty-led BDS

activism have emerged in recent years, to name a few: *Faculty for Palestine* (Toronto, June 2008), *College and University Workers United* (Montreal, January 2009), the *United States Campaign for an Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel* (USACBI, January 2009), and the *Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine/Association of Academics for the Respect of International Law in Palestine* (AURDIP, France, January 2010) and others in Spain, Australia and Lebanon. These groups have all endorsed the call by the *Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel* (PACBI), and are building on the pathbreaking international solidarity work of the *British Committee for the Universities of Palestine* (BRICUP), established in 2004.

On May 30th, 2010, the British University and Colleges Union (UCU) passed a landmark motion in the academic boycott campaign by calling for a boycott of Ariel University, illegally built on occupied Palestinian territory. Equally important, the UCU also severed links with the Histadrut, Israel's key labour institution whose entrenched ties to the Israeli state include a longstanding complicity with its illegal colonization and occupation. One day later, the second annual meeting of F4P/CUWU in Montreal saw the creation of a divestment working group. This formation reflects organizing underway on several campuses, and is inspired by the ethical divestment model issued in January 2010 by Students Against Israeli Apartheid at Carleton University in Ottawa, and strongly supported by F4P-Carleton.

Such actions in the academic sphere are part of the expanding global movement in support of the BDS campaign. Indeed, our current statement emerges during a watershed year for the cultural boycott. Five hundred artists supporting BDS have signed a collective letter through Artists Against Apartheid in Montreal, and world famous performers like Elvis Costello, Gil Scott-Heron and The Pixies have cancelled concerts in Israel in response to the BDS call. Last September, artists' protest of the Israeli-sponsored "Spotlight on Tel Aviv" program at the Toronto International Film Festival drew world attention, with several filmmakers withdrawing their films. Individual filmmakers like John Greyson (Canada) and Ken Loach (UK) have also supported the boycott by declining invitations to Israeli-state sponsored festivals, while actors Meg Ryan and Dustin Hoffman also refused participation in the Jerusalem Film Festival just one day after Israel's deadly assault on the flotilla. Unions - from postal workers to dockworkers to public sector employees - have been at the forefront of workers' solidarity movements and resolutions in support of BDS. This includes CUPE-Ontario (2006), Canadian Union of Postal Workers (2008), and a resolution supporting BDS on the Palestine-Israel question passed in May 2007 by the Fédération nationale des enseignantes et des

enseignants du Québec (FNEEQ), representing teachers in Quebec higher education institutions. The growing popularity of consumer boycotts is also evident from the many actions targeting products and companies at the March 30 Global BDS Day of Action.

With this joint statement we signal today our intent to call on faculty and academics of all ranks from universities, CEGEPs and colleges across Canada and Quebec to join us in taking action to put pressure on the Israeli state. We believe that university, CEGEP and college faculty have a special responsibility to hold Israel accountable. The Israeli state's deliberate and sustained campaign of attacks on Palestinian educational infrastructure in Gaza last year, including academic institutions and faculty, has been well-documented. The aim of the Freedom Flotilla was, in fact, to deliver much needed materials that Israel has denied to Gazans, including basic supplies for schools and cement to rebuild the universities and other educational infrastructure that were targeted and destroyed during the war on Gaza in 2008-09.

The Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla has underscored the relevance of the boycott of Israeli academic institutions as a viable and legitimate course of action for faculty who are working in institutions with ties to the Israeli state. We must not forget, however, that the military technology used against the flotilla is also used against civilian Palestinians on a daily basis. Indeed, the strong linkages between Israeli academic institutions and the Israeli military, as revealed by the Alternative Information Centre report of October 2009, adds further urgency to our call for action.

*We, the Joint F4P-CUWU working group on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, call for:*

- i) as a first step, transparency in disclosing institutional ties to the Israeli state and all Israeli research, post-secondary and cultural institutions; as well as investments in Israeli corporations or those partnered with the Israeli state
- ii) as an immediate next step, the renunciation of these ties and investments through the creation of ethical divestment policies on campuses
- iii) institutional policies for monitoring and reporting on ties (including research, pedagogical, financial) with Israeli educational institutions and corporations that ensure and maximize transparency and accountability (as specified in point i, above)