

Open letter in support of the worldwide movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) of products and services linked with Israel.

We the undersigned strongly support the conscientious decision of all organisations and individuals who have endorsed the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

Despite annual UN resolutions calling on Israel to adhere to international law and end its 44-year military occupation of Palestinian lands, still not a single government has acted to impose sanctions on Israel for its violations.

As governments, including our own Australian government, have failed to hold Israel accountable, it is up to people of conscience in civil society worldwide to heed Palestinian calls for protection and justice.

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement is a non-violent movement that can assist to bring peace and justice to Israelis and Palestinians. It utilises non-violent strategies, with the aim of persuading the Israeli Government to comply with its obligations under international law by:

- ending its illegal occupation and colonisation of Arab lands and illegal construction of the Wall;
- recognizing that the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel are entitled to full equality;
- meeting its legal obligations towards the 7.1 million Palestinian refugees.

Israel violates more UN resolutions than any other country in the history of the UN, including Iraq & Iran put together. It has enacted a long list of laws which discriminate against its own Arab-Palestinian citizens. Israel deprives Palestinians in the Occupied Territories access to adequate land, water, housing, health care, education and work, and restricts their freedom of movement.

The Australian government has, on our behalf, declared sanctions against fourteen different countries. The question is not whether Israel should be singled out for punitive actions – the question is, why is Israel not being held to the same standards as other countries?

Israel's right to exist is not being challenged – what is being challenged is Israel's right to exist as an apartheid state. The boycott initiative shows respect for Israel by holding it to the same standards as other western democracies.

It is time to end the occupation of Palestine and bring peace and justice to the people of Israel and Palestine. The BDS movement is playing a crucial role in raising awareness about Israel's violations of international law.

Internationally and nationally, churches and church leaders, unions, academics, public intellectuals, media personalities and others are supporting the BDS campaign. In July 2010, the National Council of Churches in Australia asked its members and the public "to consider a boycott of goods produced by Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories." A number of Australian unions, including unions representing teachers and workers in the electrical trades, construction, maritime, hospitality and education industries, are supporting the BDS campaign.

Marrickville Municipal Council, as the first local council in Australia to publicly endorse BDS, has taken a courageous step. This decision was endorsed by Councillors across the political spectrum.

While Australian and other world leaders remain reluctant to speak out against Israel's human rights abuses, the responsibility devolves to individuals and our local leadership. We thank these leaders for having the courage and integrity to speak out in the face of a well-organized campaign of intimidation.

We urge you to consider supporting the BDS movement as an individual, or by advocating that the political party, union, church or community group you belong to, or the local council where you live, adopts a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions policy towards the Israeli Government or makes BDS part of their broader ethical investment and purchasing strategy.

More information about the BDS campaign can be obtained at - www.bdsmovement.net

Yours sincerely,