

Boycott Divestment Sanctions

A trade union resource





STUC Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

(BDS) Resource

Since 2010, the STUC has supported BDS as part of a wider campaign in support of the rights of Palestinians and opposition to the policies of the state of Israel.

Its purpose is to provide practical examples of what trade unions and trade union branches can do in Scotland to support the campaign.

The STUC and international campaigning

The STUC Constitution establishes its purpose, which is to co-ordinate, develop and articulate the views and policies of the Trade Union Movement in Scotland reflecting the aspirations of trade unionists as workers and citizens. This has always been assumed to include international solidarity. Under the banner of 'an injury to one is an injury to all' Scottish trade unionists opposed the Chilean dictatorship in 1974, and found homes for Chilean refugees in Scotland. We played our part on the campaign to end apartheid including through a cultural, sporting and economic boycott of apartheid South Africa.

The Scottish trade union voice has always been loudest when criticising the actions of our own governments when through policy, military assistance or trade they support or fail to oppose repression abroad.

Thus, in recent years, we have raised our voices against the repressive actions of the Turkish state and its treatment of the Kurdish people. We oppose arms sales to the repressive Saudi regime. We support the Cuban people in the face of a 50 year long embargo imposed by the UK's most powerful ally, the USA and we support Justice for Colombia. We have condemned the election of the far-right former army captain, Bolsano in Brazil. In each of these countries, either through active policy or through passive acceptance, the UK government is culpable.

STUC policy on Israel/Palestine

The STUC supports a peaceful two state solution in Palestine and Israel with Jerusalem as a shared capital. We recognise the right for Israel to exist within pre 1967 boundaries as consistent with International Law. The ultimate agreement for co-existence between Israelis and Palestinians is a matter for those peoples and must include a resolution of the 'right of return'.

Essential steps in moving towards peace and equality are

- Returning all lands occupied by Israel in contravention of UN resolutions including withdrawal from illegal settlements
- Dismantling the illegal separation wall which explicitly privileges Jews over non-Jews and constitutes a form of apartheid
- Repeal of the Nation State Law

The STUC is highly critical of UK foreign policy on Israel/ Palestine and that of its most powerful ally, the US. The STUC condemns all violence against civilians on both sides of the conflict. However Israeli bears by far the greatest responsibility including through ongoing attacks on Gaza, shooting of Palestinian citizens and the detention of

“... you can't have a bunch of little bantustans or the whole West Bank chopped up into noncoherent, non-contiguous pieces and say this is an acceptable state...” - Former US Secretary of state Colin Powell

Palestinian children in clear breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- In May 2018, the UN Human Rights Council voted for an independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate the use of force in Gaza.

The UK abstained on the vote, instead calling on Israel to conduct its own investigation.

- The UK Government continues to approve arms sales, even as Israel continues to shoot unarmed protesters.
- In March 2019, the UK voted against resolutions in the Human Rights Council on the topics of illegal settlements, human rights, and Palestinian self-determination.

Thus we consider it our duty both to campaign for a change in UK Government policy. In the absence of a change in policy, we will continue to support national and international initiatives which pressurise the state of Israel to change course.

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

STUC's decision to promote a campaign of BDS against the



state of Israel was considered over a period of two years following consultation with Palestinian trade unions and listening to the views of the Israeli trade unions. In 2009, we organised a major fact finding mission to Israel/Palestine where the delegation spoke with dozens of peace and solidarity organisations. STUC Congress agreed to promote the campaign in 2009 after agreeing a special report.

A decade on, the major reasons for the decision to support BDS persist.

The STUC's support for BDS sits alongside its support for practical solidarity activities such as the FBU's Palestinian Firefighter exchange and Scottish Universities Support for Palestinian Students (SUSPS)

The campaign for BDS is part of the worldwide movement of civil society. Its objectives, grounded in international law and fundamental rights, are to end the occupation and dismantle Israel's illegal wall and settlements, demands full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and calls for the rights of Palestinian refugees to be upheld.

The STUC supports BDS as a campaign strategy because: it is a vibrant global movement made up of unions, academic associations, churches and grassroots movements across the world. Eleven years since its launch, BDS is having a major impact and is effectively challenging international support for Israeli state policies.

- It lets the Palestinian people know that they are not forgotten and the justice of their cause is recognised.
- It sends a signal to Israel that if it continues to flout UN resolutions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Convention and other international laws, and until it ends its brutal occupation, it will meet with the same response as any other oppressive regime breaching international law.
- It enables decisions made in their everyday lives by people outside Israel and Palestine to refresh and reinforce their opposition to Israeli policy.
- It exerts moral pressure on the British Government by giving expression to the desire to move towards a more ethical foreign policy.
- It provides a way of stimulating public debate, offers a focus for leafleting and discussion, as well as exerting moral and economic pressure on Israel to comply with international legislation and principles of justice.

What does BDS entail?

BOYCOTTS involve withdrawing support for Israel and Israeli and international companies that are involved in the violation of Palestinian human rights, as well as complicit Israeli sporting, cultural and academic institutions.

DIVESTMENT campaigns urge banks, local councils, churches, pension funds and universities to withdraw investments from all Israeli companies and from international companies involved in violating Palestinian rights.

SANCTIONS campaigns pressure governments to fulfil their legal obligation to hold Israel to account including by ending military trade, free-trade agreements and expelling Israel from international forums such as the UN and FIFA.

The Right to Boycott

In the face of the successes of the international BDS campaign, the Israeli government has stepped up their efforts to counter the success of the international BDS movement. The Reut Institute, an Israeli think-tank, has taken a lead in developing a strategy against the movement. A 2010 investigation reported that:

“The risk posed is that such campaigns will create an equivalency between Israel and apartheid-era South Africa that penetrates the mainstream of public and political consciousness. Given Israel's dependence on vigorous trade – as well as scientific, academic, and technological engagement with other countries – this movement towards isolating the country may pose a strategic threat.”

<http://reut-institute.org/data/uploads/PDFVer/20100310%20Delegitimacy%20Eng.pdf>

What can we do?

In order to defend our position of international solidarity, particularly in support of the Palestinian call for BDS, it is important that we continue an ongoing dialogue between unions and BDS campaigns.

- Ensure that BDS targets are carefully chosen and consistent with the strategies of the international BDS campaign and the information provided in this resource.
- Work collectively to respond to unfair criticism of BDS and to protect individual campaigners



BDS campaigning in Scotland

Why Cultural Boycott?

Normalisation

Normalisation is the process whereby a state seeks to legitimise its policies and actions by engaging in a 'normal' way on the international stage and add through cultural events.

The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) defines normalisation as:

"In the Palestinian context, normalization refers to any activity that creates the impression that Israel is a state like any other and that Palestinians, the oppressed, and Israel, the oppressor, are both equally responsible for "the conflict". Far from challenging the unjust status quo, such projects contribute to its endurance, are intellectually dishonest and should be boycotted. An example of a boycottable normalization project would be a joint event that is designed explicitly to bring together Palestinians/Arabs and Israelis so they can present their respective narratives or perspectives, or to work toward reconciliation without addressing the root causes of injustice. However, a joint project is not boycottable if: (a) the Israeli party in the project recognizes the comprehensive Palestinian rights under international law (corresponding to the 3 rights in the BDS call); and (b) the project/activity is one of "co-resistance" to oppression rather than "co-existence" under oppression."

What can we do?

- Trade unions should be aware of what normalisation is and how it undermines the Palestinian struggle for freedom and solidarity actions/initiatives.
- Discussion and awareness-raising means that and members will be better prepared to respond to attempts to undermine trade union BDS policy. A good understanding also enables unions to move quickly when normalisation events or initiatives are offered for their endorsement or participation.

<https://bdsmovement.net/cultural-boycott>

Cultural Boycott Pledge

The 'Irish Artists' Pledge to Boycott Israel' has reached over 600 signatures, the Artists for Palestine UK pledge has over 1,300 signatures and over 500 Latin American artists have signed a pledge. Scottish PSC is launching an initiative in August 2019 to gather pledge signatures

from Scottish individual cultural workers, artists and arts organisations.

<http://www.ipsc.ie/cultural-boycott/ipsc-irish-artists-pledge-to-boycott-israel#1>

<https://artistsforpalestine.org.uk/a-pledge/>

<https://bdsmovement.net/news/over-500-latin-american-artists-endorse-cultural-boycott-israel>

- Unions that represent artists and cultural workers (which can include camera operators and scene designers) can help to promote this pledge, in the process educate members about the reasons for the Palestinian cultural boycott call.
- Branches and members can also play a part - we all know people who are involved in cultural or arts activity and can help to build up awareness and signatures for the pledge.

<https://bdsmovement.net/cultural-boycott>

State-sponsored cultural events/tours

Scotland has a strong record of challenging Israeli state-sponsored events, acts and tours. Examples include campaigns to get Edinburgh International Film festival to return sponsorship from the Israeli embassy, twice; protests against Batsheva Dance Company which prompted national newspapers to carry arguments for and against a cultural boycott of Israel; and participation of state-sponsored acts in Edinburgh Festival.

What can we do?

- Trade unions can join calls for demonstrations and open letters on this issue.
- As with any demonstration, trade union banners are always welcome and indicates civil society support for cultural boycott of Israel. Trade union involvement and participation at an early stage of campaign planning can also expose reps and members to the process of selecting targets, i.e. there are guidelines as to when to apply the boycott and is done on a case by case basis.

Sports

Over the years Israeli teams - cricket, hockey, football - have come to Scotland and have been met with vigorous protests.



What can we do?

- Trade unions and their members can take the opportunity to join any calls to protest and also to highlight the reality for Palestinians and their access and freedom to play sports.

Divestment

Divestment is a tool whereby agreed, targeted companies can be pressured to cease the parts of their activity which assist in the violation of the rights of Palestinians.

Time to Divest targets Scottish local authority pension funds and their investments in companies found to be complicit in Israel's violations of Palestinian rights and of international law. Unison Scotland, Scottish PSC and Scottish Friends of Palestine have endorsed the campaign. So far, the campaign has involved research into the holdings of each local authority pension fund and letter writing to Councillors. Unison Scotland representatives on Pension Boards have raised the issues raised by constituents. To date, Tayside and Falkirk Pension Funds have divested their holdings in Bank Hapoalim, and Israeli bank that finances illegal settlement building in occupied Palestinian land.

What can we do?

- Trade unions can officially endorse the Time to Divest campaign.
- Branches and officials can raise the matter for discussion with pension representatives.
- Some unions will have representatives sitting on Pension Boards across Scotland, education and awareness-raising is important to empower them to speak up.
- Trade union members will also be members of these pension schemes. The priority is to maximise pressure on Councils, in most cases to ensure that they are implementing existing ethical investment and social responsibility policy.

Academic

Palestinian academics launched the academic campaign in 2004 which today has support from countries and campuses across the world.

What can we do?

- Union branches can research university links

with Israeli universities and arms companies.

- Unions can add their voice to oppose government facilitation of Israel's participation in international research programs such as the EU's Horizon 2020 program and the Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange (BIRAX).
- Union members can be made aware of and participate in the discussions within their professional bodies and associations on the issue of Israel/Palestine and BDS. e.g. Royal Institute of British Architects and American Studies Association
- As part of our work on BDS, it is also important to build solidarity links with Palestinian universities and with sectors of Palestinian workers. Unions can initiate these contacts. Help to find partners and potential links can be found by contacted Scottish PSC. Note to be aware of issues relating to normalisation when establishing such links.

<https://artistsforpalestine.org.uk/why-did-riba-rescind-motion/>

<https://www.theasa.net/what-does-boycott-mean>

<http://www.eccpalestine.org/israels-participation-in-horizon-2020-aiding-and-assisting-israeli-violations-of-international-law/>

<http://www.bricup.org.uk/news/BoycottBIRAX.html>

http://freepalestine.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/No_association_factsheet_A4_2.pdf

Trade with settlements

In Ireland, the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill 2018 has passed the second stage vote in the lower house of the Irish parliament. The Bill proscribes a criminal penalty for the import or sale of goods or services into Ireland produced settlements which operate in violation of international law.

<http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/targets/third-party-states/1350-two-voting-stages-left-an-explainer-on-the-passage-of-the-occupied-territories-bill-through-the-lower-house-of-the-irish-parliament>

<https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/irish-parliament-passes-bill-ban-israeli-settlement-goods>

What can we do?

- Trade unions can be part of a discussion about



what we can do in Scotland to raise the issue with the Scottish Government. Their Procurement guidance 'Advice against trade with illegal settlements' should be noted: <https://news.gov.scot/news/advice-against-trade-with-illegal-settlements>

- Trade unions and their members can also decide to take actions such as that taken by the Rolls Royce workers against Pinochet's regime! Dock workers in California, India, South Africa and Tunisia have all refused to handle Israeli goods. In Scotland, before the JNF stopped fundraising at the Hilton due to protests, waiting staff at one dinner refused to serve when an Israeli general was the guest speaker.

Arms trade

The UK government continues to purchase arms from and selling to Israel, which means they are complicit in Israel's violations of human rights and international law.

What can we do?

- Scottish trade unions can add their voice to the campaign to end the two way arms trade with Israel.