

BDS 2010: Boycott Divestment and Sanctions directed against Israel is a two-edged sword

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It was two years ago today, 27 December, that Israel launched its invasion of Gaza, carrying out 22 days of murder and mayhem, killing 1400 and leaving 5400 civilians crippled for life. Since then it has continued to besiege the 1.5 million Gazans, causing hundreds more unnecessary deaths. Its actions were deemed war crimes by the UN Goldstone Report.

Israel remains unpunished, hiding behind the skirts of its US lobbyists, who put unrelenting pressure on every single congressman, senator and the president to prevent any condemnation of its crimes.

But its attempt to cow the Palestinians have failed. What Israel has succeeded in doing is to confirm beyond a doubt, for millions around the world, its inhuman, racist agenda.

The past two years have witnessed an awakening of world citizens to the plight of the brave Gazans. There have been more than a dozen convoys and flotillas, including Free Gaza boats that broke the siege five times, the Gaza Freedom March, the Gaza Freedom Flotilla — people of all faiths and nationalities risking life and limb to bring Gazans emergency help.

The latest, the “Asia to Gaza Solidarity Caravan”, the first from south of the equator, represents 18 countries. It reached Turkey last week having started in India, and passing through Pakistan and Iran. It timed its peaceful “invasion” of Gaza to coincide with the anniversary of Israel’s day of infamy.

These efforts to bring relief to suffering Gazans are essential but far from enough. They can be conceived of the positive tactics in a peaceful war by the Palestinians and all people of good will against apartheid Israel. This war goes by the name Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS). The war aims are to penalise Israel both politically and economically to end the siege and make a just peace with the Palestinians.

Politically BDS has coaxed more and more governments to legitimise Palestine, even going as far as to delegitimise an apartheid Israel. Important steps include:

- Venezuela and Bolivia cutting diplomatic relations with Israel in 2009 after the invasion of Gaza, Nicaragua after the attack on the Freedom Flotilla in May 2010.
- Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay recognising a “free and independent” Palestine with 1967 borders in 2010, with Paraguay to follow suit in the spring.
- Norway and Britain upgrading their Palestinian Authority representative to consul, with the new year promising more European countries to follow suit.
- Edinburgh city council rejecting a bid by French company Veolia to take over public services due to its complicity with Israeli crimes.

-also in Scotland, Stirling city council approving a comprehensive boycott campaign against Israel's "open aggression and disregard for international law."
-Marrickville, Australia, a sister city to Bethlehem since 2007, recently voting to support a comprehensive BDS campaign.

Israel besieges Gaza. BDS calls on the world to "besiege the siege", to starve Israel of its export and import markets and pressure it to make a just peace with its captives. There were many victories on this economic front in 2010 too. Examples include:

- Qatar cutting its trade relations with Israel.
- deals cancelled with Turkey, the UK, Egypt and Gulf States.
- a Turkish company demanding that Israeli companies sign a document condemning the Israeli massacre in Gaza to continue doing business. Israeli businessmen in Turkey now have to hide their identity.
- Japan's MUJI abandoning plans to invest in Israel, facing immense pressure from citizens in Japan and South Korea.
- European Union guidelines requiring supermarkets to mark the origin of produce on labels to allow consumers to distinguish between Palestinian, Israeli and settlement produce.
- Dutch pension fund PFZW disposing of the Israeli companies in its portfolio. Major Swedish and Norwegian investment funds sold their shares in all Israeli companies involved in building settlements and the separation wall.
- the Chilean parliament's decision to adopt a boycott of Israeli products made in settlements.
- the decision by companies such as Multilock to close their West Bank businesses because of human rights organisation pressure.

Dozens of BDS groups around the world, including in the US, are [singing, dancing](#) and otherwise demonstrating in front of and inside stores selling Israeli products, urging management and customers to join the boycott.

But the biggest impact on Israel, ironically, has come from the beleaguered Palestinians themselves. The Palestinian Authority (PA) has made it illegal for anything produced in settlements to be sold in Palestinian stores. The West Bank market is worth around \$200 million a year to Israeli businesses, with some settlement factories selling up to 30 per cent of their output to the Palestinian market. Seventeen factories in Mishor Adumim, a large industrial estate between East Jerusalem and Jericho, closed as a direct result of the PA boycott.

As 22,000 Palestinians are employed by settlement businesses, the PA has established a \$50 million fund to both discourage Palestinians from working in the settlements and help those who lose their jobs due to BDS successes.

While Israel's economic media passes no judgment on Israel's political and moral failings, BDS is forcing it to wake up. The Marker warned about the growing boycott of Israeli high-tech companies by European and US companies which find they cannot invest in Israel for moral reasons. Nehemia Strassler, Israel's leading economic analyst, attacked Israeli Minister of Industry, Trade and Labor Eli Yishai, for calling on the military to "destroy one hundred homes in Gaza for every rocket that falls in Israel".

"The operation in Gaza hurts the economy. The horror sights on television and the words of

politicians in Europe and Turkey change the behavior of consumers, businessmen and potential investors. Many European consumers boycott Israeli products in practice. Intellectuals call for an economic war against us and to enforce an official and full consumer boycott.”

The world is changing before our eyes. Five years ago the anti-Israel movement was limited to the far left or Arabs and Muslims. Now the campaign is entering the mainstream as a principled red and green — leftwing and Muslim — alliance

The boycott is an especially effective weapon against Israel because Israel is a small country, dependent on exports and imports. BDS was the key to ending the apartheid regime in South Africa and is fuelling world citizens with energy to do the same to Israeli apartheid.

And it is all thanks to Israel’s Operation Cast Lead, which let the world watch Israel pound Gaza with bombs on live television. Israeli-American artist Theodore Bikel, a recent convert to BDS, points to the legendary Pablo Casals, who refused to play in fascist Spain, saying, “My cello is my weapon; I choose where I play, when I play, and before whom I play.” There are many weapons mightier than the sword.

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Canadian Eric Walberg is known worldwide as a journalist specializing in the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. A graduate of University of Toronto and Cambridge in economics, he has been writing on East-West relations since the 1980s. He has lived in both the Soviet Union and Russia, and then Uzbekistan, as a UN adviser, writer, translator and lecturer. Presently a writer for the foremost Cairo newspaper, Al Ahram, he is also a regular contributor to Counterpunch, Dissident Voice, Global Research, Al-Jazeera and Turkish Weekly, and is a commentator on Voice of the Cape radio. Eric Walberg was a moderator and speaker at the Leaders for Change Summit in Istanbul in 2011.

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