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January 13, 2009

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

There has been a lot of media attention over the last week regarding CUPE Ontario's position on the Middle East. Much of it has been inaccurate in relation to the evolution of our call for a boycott of academic institutions. We want to emphasize that CUPE Ontario is not calling for a boycott of individual Israeli academics, but rather on Israeli academic institutions.

This is consistent with the policy of CUPE Ontario in relation to the struggle for peace in the Middle East. In 2006, our members voted to endorse a call from Palestinian trade unions for a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against the state of Israel. This decision by our members made us leaders in the labour movement on this important human rights and peace issue.

Since that time many other individuals, organizations and unions have joined the call for BDS as a peaceful way to effect change in the Middle East.

I refer you to the attached Question and Answer document which provides further information and clarification. I also invite you to visit our website at www.cupe.on.ca.

I have also included a statement from CUPE B.C.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sid Ryan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sid Ryan, President
CUPE Ontario

cope343

S/MiddleEast/Presidentsmessage

Patrick (Sid) Ryan
President

ONE STRONG VOICE

Fred Hahn
Secretary-Treasurer

Questions and Answers on the CUPE Ontario Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions

What does CUPE Ontario mean by Academic Boycott?

It is important to understand that this is not a call to boycott individual Israeli academics. Rather, the boycott call is aimed at academic institutions and the institutional connections that exist between universities here and those in Israel.

This could include calling on Ontario universities and university workers to:

- Refuse to participate in academic cooperation, collaboration or joint projects with Israeli universities, such as participating in conferences in Israel, refereeing or editing articles for Israeli journals, or evaluating research proposals for Israeli institutions.
- Advocate a boycott of Israeli universities, including suspension of all forms of funding and subsidies.
- Promote divestment from Israel by Ontario academic institutions.
- Work toward the condemnation of Israeli policies and actions in the occupied territories by pressing for resolutions to be adopted by academic and professional organizations and associations.

CUPE Ontario is taking this action in response to an appeal from the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees.

Why Boycott Israeli Academic Institutions?

The recent assault on Gaza has seen the total destruction of the Palestinian educational system. The Israeli military has bombed numerous universities and schools. On January 7th, Israeli forces killed over 40 Palestinian civilians who had taken shelter in a United Nations school.

The aim of the academic boycott is to put pressure on Israel to fully comply with international law, by cutting off financial support and our connections to those institutions involved in the oppression of the Palestinian people.

The call for a boycott of academic institutions is part of a broader campaign of Israeli boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) that CUPE Ontario had already approved in 2006.

What is the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS)?

In 2005, over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations, including the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), urged the world to adopt a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israeli institutions. This campaign was modeled on the BDS movement that helped end South African apartheid.

The aim of this campaign is to block the political, military and economic support that allows Israel to continue violating international law.

Is CUPE Ontario the only one calling for this? Who else supports these actions?

This campaign has wide support. Just a few weeks ago, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Father Miguel D'Escoto Brockman, stated:

"More than twenty years ago we in the United Nations took the lead from civil society when we agreed that sanctions were required to provide a nonviolent means of pressuring South Africa to end its violations. Today, perhaps we in the United Nations should consider following the lead of a new generation of civil society, who are calling for a similar non-violent campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions to pressure Israel to end its violations."

In the first week of January some 300 academics signed a letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper calling on the Canadian Government to institute sanctions against Israel.

Why is CUPE Ontario involved in this as a union?

CUPE members have identified the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a priority. The current assault on Gaza, the deaths of nearly 900 Palestinians – including many children – and desperate humanitarian need call for urgent, non-violent action such as a boycott. [More background information is available on the CUPE Ontario web site.](#)

This action is a concrete measure that will help to create conditions for peace by forcing Israel to comply with international law.

The national constitution of CUPE mandates us to do international solidarity work, and CUPE has a proud history of supporting workers around the globe. Our International Solidarity Committee campaigns on international struggles for justice and workers' rights in places like Venezuela, Columbia, Egypt and Afghanistan. Here in Canada, CUPE members defend education, health and social, community and municipal services as well as human rights.

What is CUPE Ontario's plan?

The CUPE Ontario University Workers Coordinating Committee (OUWCC) will further this work by supporting a motion to boycott Israeli academic institutions, as part of the protest against the bombing assault on Gaza and, in particular, the bombing of the Islamic University on December 29, 2008.

CUPE BC Statement on the Gaza Crisis

NEWS RELEASE - January 13, 2009

www.cupe.bc.ca

BURNABY—CUPE BC strongly condemns the Israeli bombardment and attacks on the defenseless people of Gaza. The targeting of schools, universities and medical centers, and the killing of hundreds of Palestinian civilians, is totally unacceptable and must stop immediately.

Gaza is a territory which is about the same size as the City of Surrey but, unlike the City of Surrey, is occupied territory whose borders are controlled entirely by Israel. One and a half million Palestinians are imprisoned in this territory surrounded by barbed wire and the sea. There is no exit. For the past two years, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) blockaded the Gaza Strip, letting in just enough supplies to prevent starvation, but that is about it. There is no economy, no hope, and no real life in Gaza. The Israeli blockade is a flagrant violation of international law.

The Palestinians resist this blockade by throwing up rockets which land indiscriminately in Israeli territory. The firing of such rockets by Hamas is also contrary to international law, and is condemned, because citizens of Israel are affected. Over the past seven years, 14 Israelis have been killed by rockets fired from Gaza. During the same period, Israel has killed more than 5,000 Palestinians using some of the most advanced American-supplied arms in the world. While no rockets are fired from the West Bank, another Palestinian territory occupied by Israel, 45 Palestinians have died there under Israel's hand this year alone. The issue is not just the vast disparity in weapons and power, but that Israel is the occupier, the Palestinian people are the occupied.

It is the illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories which is the primary cause of the current situation in Gaza.

CUPE BC calls on the Canadian government and the international community to do everything possible to put an end to this massacre. There must be an immediate ceasefire and an end to the blockade of Gaza by Israel.

CUPE BC has always believed that our work to define the issues as best we can, with tools such as The Wall Must Fall, would contribute to a climate of dialogue that could help to resolve the conflict. However, the current crisis has come to a point that only international intervention will have any impact. The loss of life, be it Israeli or Palestinian, is a crisis that must be addressed.