



28 October 2011

Dear Friends,

I am writing to you because the boycotts, divestment and sanctions movement is gaining more attention within Australia. The series of recent articles published in The Australian about the University of Sydney-Israel Research Forum, have prompted me to clarify the position of the General Delegation of Palestine on this matter.

Since 1988 and the Declaration of Statehood, the commitment and position of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and later the Palestinian Authority has been and remains, to fully embrace and support non-violent strategies for achieving Palestinian self-determination in the form of a viable, independent, sovereign and democratic Palestinian state and the rights of Palestinian people.

There are 3 core strategies for achieving self-determination and the rights of Palestinian people. These strategies are: Building Palestine as a state and strengthening Palestinian civil society; Extending and strengthening international support and recognition for Palestine; and Supporting negotiations conducted within a clear international framework to resolve Final Status Issues.

Actions that build Palestine as a state and strengthen Palestinian society include; building national unity, supporting non-violent struggle against the occupation, implementing development programs, strengthening Palestinian sovereignty, strengthening Palestinian civil society through networking and joint action, working equitably with appropriate Israeli civil society organisations, building institutions of state and enhancing democratic practice.

Extending and strengthening international support occurs through active international diplomacy including public diplomacy, education and lobbying, the extension of bilateral relationships, accessing the international legal system for redress and justice, working effectively within the media and extending recognition of Palestinian statehood.

Support for negotiations includes advocating for the enforcement of international and humanitarian law, complying with international agreements, and complying with and demanding the enforcement of international and humanitarian law and UN resolutions.

Palestinian people are deeply appreciative of the work of Australian organisations and individuals. Australia's committed and courageous work extends from development assistance, skill sharing, human rights advocacy, awareness raising and solidarity. All of this work is integral to Palestinian self-determination.

Many Australian organisations have forged strong relationships with Palestinian organisations and listen to the real needs and the diverse perspectives of Palestinian people as we build our democratic state and future. Those of you who have travelled to Palestine have personally experienced the warm gratitude of Palestinian people, our real appreciation and our deep respect for the work of Australian organisations and persons.

Boycotts are one of the non-violent actions for Palestinian self-determination and are part of a noble and long-standing international tradition of non-violent civil action. Boycotts target a profound human wrong and promote peaceful, systematic disengagement from that profound wrong.

Stretching back to the sugar boycotts that targeted the brutal inhumanity of the transatlantic slave trade to more recent civil rights boycotts including anti-apartheid boycotts, boycotts have been a part of the work to achieve freedom for those forced to live under profound wrongs.

Importantly, boycotts can make non-violent action available to all persons within their unique and everyday context. Because boycotts can extend meaningful non-violent action to mainstream society, boycotts generate intense interest and often volatile debate. Recent media articles on the Max Brenner chocolate shop in Melbourne and the University of Sydney-Israel Research Forum are an example of this interest and debate.

The position of the PLO and the PA is to commit to a settlement boycott as it is settlements that are destroying a viable, sustainable sovereign Palestinian state and are in gross and systematic violation of international law.

Settlements and their infrastructure rob Palestinian people of their land and resources, fracture normal Palestinian life and are in gross and systematic violation of the 4th Geneva Convention and the earlier Hague Convention and its Regulations that form part of customary international law.

All settlements are illegal including settlements in East Jerusalem, which also prejudice Final Status outcomes and attempt to undermine East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state.

Yet in defiance of reality, Israel continues to expand existing settlements, build new settlements and talks of annexing settlements into Israel. Israel's defiance of international and humanitarian law, Security Council resolutions and international agreements is stopping meaningful negotiations, negotiations that are central to the peaceful and durable resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

A boycott of settlements is the position of the PLO and the PA. Equally, the PLO, the PA and myself as Head of the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, fully uphold the fundamental democratic rights of Palestinian people to promote non-violent actions that may be different to the non-violent actions of the PLO and the PA.

The BNC or Palestinian Boycott National Committee democratically brings together a range of civil society organisations and boycott positions. The BNC works peacefully around core principles for self-determination and the rights of Palestinian people. Importantly, the BNC does not prescribe singular actions or a universal template for boycott action.

It is worth noting that when Australian MP's travelled to Palestine in April this year under the auspices of the General Delegation of Palestine, I arranged for Australian MP's to meet with Omar Barghouti BNC Coordinator. Australian MP's heard about the work of the BNC, its core principles and its responsive mode of operations, in addition to learning the PLO and PA position of settlement boycott and its rationale.

As the Head of the General Delegation of Palestine, I support strategies and actions that work towards Palestinian self-determination in the form of a Palestinian state and the rights of Palestinian people. I hold the position of the PLO and the PA in committing to a settlement boycott while I also support the democratic right of organisations to engage in non-violent advocacy that legitimately and responsively furthers the self-determination and full rights of Palestinian people.

These are the principles, strategies and positions I have sought to consistently represent in all of my communications in speeches, interviews, workshops, writing and in personal discussions.

I have written this letter because I have received emails regarding the article published in The Australian on 26 October and I am genuinely sorry if my inability to clearly and effectively communicate these fundamental non-violent and democratic principles of self-determination and freedom, has caused difficulty for you personally or confusion for your organisation.

I would like to share with you that I believe Australian advocacy for Palestine is strengthening. I strongly support the building of relationships between Australian civil society organisations and Palestinian civil society organisations. I strongly support civil society organisations working together around common principles and joint actions to increase their effectiveness.

I believe the effectiveness of civil society networks springs from an ability to value and work respectfully across organizational difference. Deep in my heart, I very much hope to see more engagement of difference as strength and future cooperation across sectors and organisations.

Warm Regards

Izzat Abdulhadi



Ambassador

Head of the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific

