

Oct. 12, 2016  
CJPME, 10090 Saint-Laurent, Suite 201B  
Montreal, QC H3L 2N7

Ms. Laura Albanese  
Min. of Finance, 7th Flr., Frost Bldg. S., 7 Queen's Pk. Cres.  
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

Re: Free expression and the potential for Anti-BDS bills

Dear Ms. Albanese,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to you to pre-emptively oppose any “anti-BDS” bill being passed in the Ontario legislature.

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, targeting Israel for economic pressure, has been embraced by literally hundreds of Canadian groups – ours included. It is a movement supported around the world because it is a democratic, non-violent strategy to encourage Israel to respect international law and the human rights of Palestinians.

Unfortunately, as the result of lobbying pressure by BDS’ opponents, several US states have considered anti-BDS bills against proponents of BDS. One such bill was even considered (but ultimately defeated) by the Ontario legislature in May. Such bills often wrongly seek to impose sweeping government sanctions on entities and individuals who support BDS.

The international BDS movement was launched by 170 organizations of Palestinian civil society in 2005 after Palestinians waited in vain for decades for favourable international legal decisions, favourable UN resolutions, and repeated negotiations sessions to bring relief. The three demands of BDS can be found at <http://bdsmovement.net/call>, and can be summarized as:

- 1) An end to Israel’s occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967 and a dismantling of Israel’s Wall;
- 2) A recognition of the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
- 3) A respect for the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, or otherwise be compensated according to UN resolution 194.

Many politicians vote against such anti-BDS bills out of support for free expression, regardless of how they feel about the BDS movement or the Israel-Palestine conflict. After the introduction of the Ontario bill in May, both the Ontario Civil Liberties Association and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) condemned it. The BCCLA stated, “To be clear, governmental bodies can generally choose their contractors. What we say they can’t do is enshrine political discrimination in law, chill rights to public participation, sanction political witch hunts and threaten and punish individuals for their political views. The claim that this bill will not affect rights to free expression is simply ridiculous. It is designed to do that very thing. It is shocking that the government of Ontario is considering such a bill. We say it is almost certainly not constitutional, and a very serious curtailing of democratic rights.”<sup>1</sup>

Canadian politicians should also be aware that Amnesty International – the world’s premier human rights organization – slammed an anti-BDS motion that passed in Federal Parliament on February 22. Like the BCCLA and the OCLA, Amnesty censured the motion on the basis of free speech, saying that the motion could “undermine the right of individuals to exercise their free expression right to promote the BDS movement.”<sup>2</sup>

Beyond the question of free expression, however, anti-BDS bills should be rejected because BDS is good policy: for the Canadian government and for international peace. The first attachment to this letter demonstrates how the BDS movement aligns wholly with both international law and Canada’s own foreign policy objectives on Palestine-Israel. The second gold “BDS” factsheet provides greater detail about the movement generally – its motivations and desired results – and the questions that sometimes arise about the movement.

The opponents of BDS seek to smear it as “anti-Semitic”, “anti-Jewish” or “anti-Israeli,” or suggest that it targets Jewish-owned businesses. These accusations are false. Rather, the BDS movement seeks to non-violently pressure the Israeli government – not individual Jews or Israelis – to fulfill its human rights obligations under international law. When Israel’s human rights abuses end, so will the BDS movement.

Should you wish to meet with BDS organizers local to your riding, we would be happy to try to organize a meeting. Should you become aware of any “anti-BDS” bill being considered in the Ontario legislature, please contact Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) at 438-380-5410 or [info@cjpme.org](mailto:info@cjpme.org), and we will answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Thomas Woodley, President, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East  
Fred Hahn, President, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario  
Tyler Levitan, Campaigns Coordinator, Independent Jewish Voices Canada  
Samer Majzoub, President, Canadian Muslim Forum  
Bruce Katz, Co-President, Palestinian and Jewish Unity (PAJU)  
Steve Berube, Co-chair, United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine-Israel  
Marianna Harris, Co-chair, United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine-Israel  
Ayman Shakra, President, Palestinian Canadian Congress  
Martha Lucia Blandón, Chair, Colombian Action Solidarity Alliance - CASA  
Ismail Zayid, President, Canada Palestine Association  
Brian De Matos, Secretary of the Steering Committee, Queer Ontario  
Mohamed Boudjenane, Acting President, Canadian Arab Federation  
Pance Stojkovski, Secretary, Socialist Project  
Reuben Roth, Coordinator, Palestine Solidarity Working Group (Sudbury)  
Margaret Rao, President, Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice  
Peter Haresnape, General Secretary, Student Christian Movement of Canada  
Marco Antonio Castillo, Secretary, Latin American and Caribbean Solidarity Network.  
Derik Chica, Chair, Educators for Peace and Justice  
Scott Harris, Chair, Palestine Solidarity Network - Edmonton  
Kay Ma, Coordinator, OPIRG Peterborough  
Jim Davies, Coordinator, OPIRG Windsor  
Charlotte Kates, International Coordinator, Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network  
Martha Lucia Blandón, Chair, Latin American and Caribbean Solidarity Network - LACSN  
Maria Paez Victor, Spokesperson, The Louis Riel Bolivarian Circle (Toronto)  
Annette Lengyel, Secretary, BDS Action Calgary  
Hammam Farah, Alumni Advisor, Students Against Israeli Apartheid at York University  
Barry Weisleder, Federal Secretary, Socialist Action  
Ken Stone, Treasurer, Hamilton Coalition To Stop The War  
Helga Mankovitz, Steering Committee, Independent Jewish Voices Kingston  
Ralph Carl Wushke, Minister, Bathurst Street United Church  
President, Run for Palestine - National  
Sue Goldstein, Organizer, International Jewish Anti-Zionist network

---

<sup>1</sup> “The BCCLA responds to Ontario’s Anti-BDS Participation Bill,” BC Civil Liberties Association, May 19, 2016, <https://bccla.org/news/2016/05/the-bccla-responds-to-ontarios-anti-bds-participation-bill/> accessed May 22, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Neve, Alex and Vaugrante, Beatrice “Freedom of Speech and Criticism of Israel’s Human Rights Record,” Amnesty International Canada, Friday, May 6, 2016, <http://www.amnesty.ca/blog/freedom-speech-and-criticism-israel%E2%80%99s-human-rights-record> accessed May 10, 2016