

The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) is a wide coalition of the largest Palestinian mass organizations, trade unions, networks and organizations.

Member organizations:

Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine
Gen. Union of Palestinian Workers
Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions
Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)
Palestinian Nat'l Institute for NGOs
Federation of Indep. Trade Unions
Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition
Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Initiative
Gen. Union of Palestinian Women
Union of Palestinian Farmers
Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (STW)
Nat'l Committee for Grassroots Resistance
Pal. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)
Nat'l Committee to Commemorate the Nakba
Civic Coalition for the Defense of Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem
Coalition for Jerusalem
Union of Pal. Charitable Organizations
Palestinian Economic Monitor
Union of Youth Activity Centers- Palestine Refugee Camps
Union of Professional Associations

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BNC condemns repression of French BDS activists

Occupied Palestine, 9 September 2010 - The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC), on behalf of its constituent organizations and unions representing the majority of Palestinian civil society, strongly condemns the decision taken by French authorities to prosecute people of conscience for calling for a boycott of Israeli produce. These state-sanctioned forms of repression amount to active support for Israeli violations of international law and have serious implications on political freedoms in France and across Europe.

On September 13, five members of the group "Boycott 68" will appear in court charged with "incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence" after distributing leaflets asking shoppers to boycott Israeli products.¹ Last year, Sakina Arnaud was fined €1000 for attaching a 'Boycott Israel' sticker to a fruit juice carton. Ms Arnaud will appear in court again on September 24 to appeal the decision. The campaign for Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, called for by Palestinian civil society in 2005², is a non-violent, just and effective way of pressuring Israel to comply with international law and end its institutionalised discrimination and violence towards Palestinians. People of conscience all over the world, including many progressive Israelis and Jews, engage in BDS campaigns as a form of solidarity with an oppressed people, suffering under Israeli occupation and apartheid. BDS is based on unambiguous respect for international law and universal human rights; as such, it is categorically opposed to all forms of racism and racial discrimination, including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. The BNC is therefore deeply troubled by state-sanctioned smear campaigns against BDS activists.

Most of the cases against solidarity activists have been brought following pressure from Bureau National de Vigilance Contre l'Antisémitisme (BNCVA) with assistance from other pro-Israel pressure groups and are part of a wider campaign of attacks against Palestine solidarity activism. "Altogether, we have filed over 80 similar complaints, everywhere in France," the President of BNCVA boasted recently.³ The BNC has previously criticised the French Prime Minister for making unfounded and inflammatory insinuations about the movement to boycott Israel.⁴ According to activists, police regularly demand the names and addresses of those present at BDS demonstrations. The BNC is astounded that the authorities in a country that has historically contributed so much to the development of the principles of citizenship and human rights would succumb so easily to the demands of the Israel lobby and curtail political freedoms so blatantly.

French MEPs Jacky Henin and Nicole Kill-Nielsen recently spoke out against the repression of Palestine activists. "In that case, justice is used for political purposes," said Henin.⁵ The BNC hopes that these comments will enrich the debate in France about the repression of those who stand in solidarity with Palestinians.

The actions taken by French state bodies to shield Israel from legitimate criticism and opposition show the strength of the BDS movement on one hand, but also reduce the possibilities of a just and lasting peace, present a serious threat to freedom of expression, and bolster Israel's impunity in violating human rights on the other. The failure of the French government to end its complicity in maintaining and protecting Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian rights, let alone to hold Israel accountable for these violations, calls into question France's compliance with its own obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice against Israel's Wall and colonial settlements. Its active repression of principled activists who attempt to remedy this failure is reprehensible.

The BNC warmly salutes all French BDS activists due to appear in court and is inspired by their stated intention to step up their campaigns in reaction to this repression. We call upon the French government to:

- Drop all charges against activists engaged in non-violent, morally commendable solidarity campaigns aimed at challenging Israel's grave violations of international law and official French complicity;
- Take measures to ensure that France's rich history of political freedom is maintained and that freedom of association and freedom of speech are not curtailed in this shameful way again;
- End France's complicity in maintaining Israel's occupation and apartheid and hold Israel accountable for its persistent violation of international law.

The BNC also calls upon people of conscience and international solidarity groups to:

- Send messages of support to the activists due to appear in court by email at campagnebdsfrance@yahoo.fr
- Write to the French embassy in your country demanding that these charges be dropped and condemning France's repression of basic freedoms and civil rights.

- **BNC Secretariat**

¹ http://www.bdsfrance.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59&Itemid=43#mproces

² <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/52>

³ <http://www.lepays.fr/fr/article/3746719/Soutien-d-eurodeputes-a-des-militants-francais-poursuivis-pour-avoir-appelle-au-boycott-d-Israel.html>

⁴ <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/645>

⁵ <http://www.lepays.fr/fr/article/3746719/Soutien-d-eurodeputes-a-des-militants-francais-poursuivis-pour-avoir-appelle-au-boycott-d-Israel.html>