

Palestine 2005: Time for sanctions against Israel

“We believe that imposing sanctions against Israel is a practical way to force the Israeli government to listen to the world and to think twice before practising its aggressive policy against the Palestinian people.”

Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions

Poverty in Palestine

Palestine is facing a humanitarian catastrophe. UN reports reveal that 60% of Palestinians are now living in acute poverty, a figure which has tripled in just four years. Over 22% of children under 5 are suffering from serious malnutrition and 16% from acute anaemia, many of whom will suffer permanent damage to their physical and mental development as a result. The majority of families are now eating only once a day, and over 50% of Palestinians are now completely dependent on food aid – an “absurd” crisis in a land so fertile, according to the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

These increases in poverty are a direct result of Israel’s military occupation of the Palestinian Territories and its intensification of action against the Palestinian people over the past four years. The UN lists the following activities as specific causes of the humanitarian crisis facing the Palestinians:

- Israel’s confiscation of thousands of acres of the most fertile Palestinian agricultural land in order to build its illegal Separation Wall
- the confiscation of further Palestinian agricultural land and water resources for the construction of Israeli settler colonies and ‘settler only’ roads
- the systematic destruction of Palestinian homes, olive groves and water systems in repeated assaults by the Israeli armed forces and armoured bulldozers
- Israeli closures and restrictions on movement, which have destroyed the Palestinian economy and created a series of ghettos in place of a coherent Palestinian territory
- the Israeli army’s obstruction of humanitarian aid destined for Palestinian families



Photo: Reuters/Popperfoto

War on Want's campaigning work has focused attention in particular on the poverty caused by Israel's construction of its illegal Separation Wall. The Wall extends deep into Palestinian territory, and the clearance of land for its construction has destroyed the livelihoods of Palestinians living near its route. The UN notes that the Wall has cut off Palestinians from their schools, universities, fields, hospitals, families and friends, with restrictions on movement which closely resemble the infamous 'pass laws' of apartheid South Africa.

On 9 July 2004 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) – the UN's highest judicial body – issued its advisory opinion that the Wall is in contravention of international law, and called on Israel both to cease construction and to dismantle all parts of the Wall already built. On 20 July 2004 the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to demand that Israel abide by the ICJ's ruling. The Israeli government, however, has refused to comply with the ICJ's opinion, and continues to build the Wall.

The need for sanctions

The UN's Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, John Dugard, has stated that: "Israel's defiance of international law poses a threat not only to the international legal order but to the international order itself." Questioned at the UN in October 2004, Dugard called on regional bodies – and especially the EU – to apply pressure on Israel to comply with international law. A

former member of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Dugard recalled the importance of international sanctions imposed by individual states on apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. Dugard also encouraged civil society organisations to take up the call for economic action.

Many organisations and individuals have now joined the call for sanctions against Israel; the statements of some of these are reproduced in this briefing. In addition to official Palestinian representatives, trade unions and other civil society organisations, there have been calls for sanctions from the 115 member states of the Non-Aligned Movement and from UN special rapporteurs. Jonathan Shapiro, a former pilot in the Israeli air force and a leading figure among Israeli refuseniks, also called for sanctions against his country's illegal occupation of Palestine while speaking at the European Social Forum in October 2004.

The EU-Israel Association Agreement

Within the EU context, the call for sanctions has focused on suspension of the trading preferences which Israel enjoys as a result of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. The Agreement, which entered into force in June 2000, provides Israel with duty-free access to the EU for its industrial and manufactured goods, as well as progressively greater access for agricultural exports. The EU is Israel's principal trading partner, with approximately 30% of Israeli exports sold into EU markets.

"What, then, should be done? It is pointless to take the issue to the UN Security Council, since the Bush administration... would veto any resolution condemning the Israeli government. Economic sanctions and an arms ban against Israel are the only way of breaking the impasse."

Sir Gerald Kaufman MP,
July 2004

"That this House... calls upon Her Majesty's Government to use all means at its disposal, including the introduction of sanctions against Israel, to persuade the Government of Israel to comply with the International Court of Justice and the UN Resolution."

House of Commons Early Day
Motion no 162, November 2004

"Every pressure, whether economic or diplomatic, must be exerted to encourage Israel to reverse its colonisation policies... There is an inherent contradiction in supporting the ICJ decision and opposing Israel's illegal colonies, while simultaneously providing Israel with preferential trade relations in the form of the EU-Israel association agreement."

Dr Saeb Erekat, Chief Palestinian
Negotiator, September 2004

"PNGO calls upon the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to take all measures necessary to enforce the provisions of the ICJ ruling, including the imposing of sanctions on Israel."

Palestinian NGO Network
(PNGO), July 2004



Over 100 miles of Israel's illegal Separation Wall have already been built; a full route of more than 450 miles of concrete and barbed wire fencing is planned.

Photo: Arofish

Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement states that respect for human rights “constitutes an essential element of this Agreement”. Jean Ziegler, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, has drawn attention to the importance of this human rights condition within the EU’s trade relations with Israel, and has argued that it must now be invoked. Speaking shortly before presenting his report to the UN General Assembly in October 2004, Ziegler specifically called on the EU to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement on human rights grounds.

In the UK, this call has already attracted significant support from within Parliament. Early Day Motion no 162 (introduced on 24 November 2004) calls on the UK government “to use all means at its disposal, including the introduction of sanctions against Israel, to persuade the Government of Israel to comply with the International Court of Justice and the UN Resolution”. Many have asked how the EU can continue to reward Israel with preferential trading opportunities when Israel has so conspicuously failed to abide by the human rights requirements of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

There is also considerable support across the EU for sanctions against Israel. In addition to a longstanding campaign by European civil society organisations, the European Parliament has voted for suspension of the trading preferences enjoyed by Israel under the EU-Israel Association Agreement on more than one occasion. A new petition calling for sanctions against Israel signed by 275 European parliamentarians was presented to EU foreign ministers in May 2004, and some EU member states have now stated their support for action in face of Israel’s continuing abuse of Palestinian human rights. Yet the European Commission remains unmoved by the calls, and Israel’s trading preferences remain intact.

“With regard to Member States, the Ministers called upon them to take measures, including by means of legislation, collectively, regionally and individually, to... impose sanctions against companies and entities involved in the construction of the wall and other illegal activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.”

Declaration of the 115 Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement, August 2004

The UK's special position during 2005

The UK government voted in support of the UN General Assembly's July 2004 resolution that Israel must comply with the ICJ's advisory opinion on the Separation Wall. Yet the ICJ also called on all states which are party to the Fourth Geneva Convention, such as the UK, to ensure Israel's compliance with the legal requirements of that Convention. The UN General Assembly's resolution further reinforced this call.

The UK has shied away from imposing economic pressure on Israel, trusting instead in a policy of "close engagement" to exert influence. The evidence of continuing Israeli abuses against Palestinians shows just how ineffective such a policy has proved, and international opinion is now crying out for stronger action from the world's most powerful states. In the words of the UN's Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, John Dugard, "This is no time for appeasement on the part of the international community."

The UK government has a unique opportunity to work for justice and peace in Palestine during 2005. Not only will the UK host the G8 summit of the world's most powerful economies in July 2005, but the UK also assumes the presidency of the EU for the second half of the year. The UK government has signalled its commitment to a just peace for the Palestinian people. 2005 is the time to turn that commitment into a reality.

Call to the UK government

War on Want calls on the UK government to press for an immediate suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement and the trading preferences it confers on Israel. Israel's violation of Palestinian human rights, as documented by the United Nations, is in clear breach of Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement and is the direct cause of the massive increase in poverty currently recorded in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The UK government must honour its obligations under international humanitarian law and take action to enforce the will of the International Court of Justice and the United Nations. Anything less will be seen as a betrayal of the Palestinian people.

No Wall – the campaign

War on Want has campaigned to raise awareness of the poverty caused by Israel's military occupation of Palestine, including through publication of a survey of the economic and social impacts of the occupation: Fighting Palestinian Poverty. War on Want has drawn particular attention to the impact of Israel's illegal Separation Wall on the lives of Palestinians, including through a dedicated No Wall website. To order your free campaign pack, visit: www.nowall.org.uk

"The Special Rapporteur reminds States of their obligation not to recognize the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the Wall and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by such construction. In addition, all States parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention are obliged to ensure compliance by Israel with the international humanitarian law embodied in this Convention. Israel's defiance of international law poses a threat not only to the international legal order but to the international order itself. This is no time for appeasement on the part of the international community."

John Dugard, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,
August 2004

"There is only one possible weapon to fight for the right to food: that's Article 2 of the contract of association between Israel and the European Union... Grave violations of the right to food have been recorded, they are clear. This accord must be suspended."

Jean Ziegler, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food,
October 2004