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*The following is an English translation of the call "Nous appelons au boycott des produits israéliens !" published on Mediapart on January 19, 2016*

**Call to boycott Israeli goods**

We will not comply with the decision of the Cour de Cassation of October 20, 2015!

On October 20, 2015, through two decisions, the Cour de Cassation [the highest appeals court in France] declared that the call to boycott Israeli products is illegal, and confirmed the severe sentence that had been imposed on several activists of the BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) movement. To this end, the court made use of an article on the law of the press that refers to the misdemeanour of "provocation to discrimination, to hatred or to violence against an individual or a group of people by virtue of their origin or their belonging to a specific ethnic group, nation, race, or religion."

This decision is not merely surprising; it is scandalous. The law in question was intended to protect an individual or a group of people who are victims of discrimination by virtue of their origin or their belonging or not belonging to an ethnic group, nation, race, or religion. It was by no means intended to protect the policies of a State against civic criticism, when that criticism takes the form of a boycott of goods. On many occasions, organizations around the world have

called for a boycott of Burma, Russia, China, or Mexico, and this clause was never invoked.

Despite the insistence of the Ministry of Justice, most of the French jurisdictions that have been called upon to rule on this question in recent years have refused to consider the call to boycott Israeli goods to be a criminal offense.

With the decision of the Court of Cassation, France has become the only democracy in the world to impose such a prohibition. The situation is that much more paradoxical in a country that for a year has not stopped insisting on its devotion to freedom of expression, and it's more than likely that the European Court of Human Rights will annul this judgment. Even the Court of Cassation has to take responsibility for its decisions and to respect universal principles, which notably include freedom of expression.

The BDS movement was created in the context of a failure of the international community, which was unable to put an end to settlements and to protect Palestinians from the daily abuses at the hands of the army and Israeli settlers. The boycott movement has been meeting with growing success around the world, as the only non-violent means to put pressure on Israel. It allows all those who wish to find a peaceful expression of their solidarity and to protest against Israel's favored treatment on the part of the international community, in spite of its constant violations of international law. This is why we are calling to support and strengthen the BDS movement and to boycott Israeli goods.

Signatories:

Ahmed Abbes, Directeur de recherche au CNRS, Paris  
Sihame Assbague, activist  
Etienne Balibar, Professeur émérite, Université de Paris-Ouest Nanterre  
Saïd Bouamama, sociologist  
Rony Brauman, medical doctor, essayist  
Sonia Dayan, Professeure émérite, l'Université Paris Diderot-Paris7  
Christine Delphy, sociologist, cofounder of Nouvelles Questions Féministes  
Alain Gresh, journalist  
Nacira Guénif, sociologist, Université Paris 8  
Christian Salmon, author  
Azzedine Taïbi, Mayor of Stains  
Marie-Christine Vergiat, member of European Parliament

## **Petition in support of the right to call for a boycott of Israeli goods in France**

The criminal division of the Court of Cassation, France's highest appeals court, issued a decision last October, affirming that the call to boycott Israeli goods is a misdemeanour in France and punishable as such. A small group of activists of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, who in 2010 had chanted slogans, handed out leaflets, and worn T-shirts at a supermarket near Mulhouse, calling for a boycott of Israeli goods, had been brought to trial for "provoking discrimination" against the producers and suppliers of goods (considered as a "group of people") by reason of their belonging to the Israeli nation. The activists were cleared at the first trial, but in November 2013, they were found guilty upon appeal by the Colmar Appeals Court, and were sentenced to pay 12000 euros in damages to the plaintiffs, as well as stiff legal fees. In rejecting their appeal of this sentence, the Court of Cassation affirmed that in calling upon consumers not to buy Israeli goods, the activists were indeed guilty of a misdemeanour — a call to national discrimination — and that the Colmar Appeals Court sentence was thus legally justified.

By the decision of October 20, 2015, France becomes the only country in the world — alongside Israel — to penalize civic appeals not to buy Israeli goods. In all the major democratic countries, the Israeli government's repeated demands to penalize boycott calls have been rejected, in the name of freedom of expression, of the need for a democratic debate (which may include controversial aspects) on international questions, and of respect for political associations. Whether one is for or against BDS as a way of bringing about a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on international law, no one outside France denies the peaceful character of the movement and its right to act and to develop, notably by boycott calls, including the call to boycott Israeli goods.

In this spirit, a group of French intellectuals and activists has recently announced their intention to defy the Court of Cassation, and the policy of the past two French governments, by calling explicitly for a boycott of Israeli goods. In doing so they know they risk prosecution for an act that elsewhere is considered protected freedom of speech. A translation of the new boycott statement is copied below. Whether or not you agree with the tactics of BDS, we ask you to

support freedom of speech in France by signing our petition.

We, the undersigned academics, many of us with long connections to France, are shocked to learn that the French Court of Cassation issued a ruling last October that qualifies the call to boycott Israeli goods as a crime under French law. While we do not all necessarily agree with the call to boycott Israeli goods, we do recognize that the call to boycott a state or an institution for its unjust practices is universally considered a legitimate form of peaceful non-violent protest. It is unacceptable for France, a country that makes a point of claiming freedom of speech as one of its guiding principles, to criminalize a fundamental right of political expression. We call upon the French government to display consistency in its defence of freedom of speech and to cease its persecution of non-violent protestors.

The initial list of signatories numbered 164. The petition was closed on the 5th of February 2016.

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*The Right to Education (R2E) Campaign at Birzeit University aims to document, archive, and take action against the unacceptable realities of an education under occupation.*

## **A Palestinian Education Story**

This R2E article was written by Omar Najdi, a second year student of IT at Birzeit University and a volunteer in the R2E Campaign.

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It's 5 am, and I am wondering why my mother just woke me up so early. I am washing my face and trying to hurry up as my sister is knocking on the bathroom door, telling me to get out so that she won't be late too. It is Tuesday so the week is still young and the weekend won't be here any time soon. Half an hour later I'm in the taxi; falling asleep and waking up depending on the road bumps. We keep speeding on. Finally it's 6am but we are stopped for a "random but usual" inspection: no sign of anybody around. We just stand here after being told to step out of the taxi: I am shivering; January has never been warm in Palestine. An hour passes by and still no order to allow us back in the taxi. I stop thinking about the cold as my mind shifts to my first class exam; it's already 7am and the exam is in an hour! Now it is 7:45am and we are allowed to pass but it's already too late: I get to school at 8:30 and have already missed my exam and I am feeling cold from standing in the street for two hours.

This seems like a cruel imaginary story of a student, thinking of what could possibly be their worst nightmare in which there is an early appointment to be made so that all the effort of studying will not go to waste. In fact, standing in the street waiting for mercy from a soldier in his cabin is not something imaginary; 81.6% of Palestinian students were forced to skip school and university for at least a few days because of checkpoints and the segregation wall; [many \(3.4%\) quit school entirely](#) since they aren't able to reach it anymore. Moreover, students who are forced to wake up at 5am get insufficient sleep, which is harmful; a [recent study](#) showed that not getting enough sleep can actually affect the educational future in the long term and can cause serious damage. This is especially so when the brain is still in the process of developing: when students between the ages of 5 and 10 find themselves in such situations on a daily basis it makes them anxious and leaves them with no enthusiasm for the weekend; with no passion to study; and if continued can lead them to quit school.

In addition to what Palestinians students go through each day, they are also discouraged when they open their textbooks and see a curriculum that doesn't relate to the Palestinian context at all: the Israeli occupation purposely attempts to sabotage what is taught to Palestinian students and they ban certain books and schoolbooks from being accessed at all. They make absurd justifications for breaching the right to education, which is established in international law and the declaration of human rights. Moreover, the right to education itself is breached directly when schools are bombed, destroying any proper environment to get a proper education. In 2014, after the assault on the 365 sq.km Gaza strip ended, an estimated [188 schools have been either totally or partially destroyed](#) and the remaining schools in Gaza were used as shelters for people whose houses were destroyed, causing the school semester to be delayed by one month. The psychological trauma caused by what they have seen also affected the student's performance. The violations committed by the Israeli occupation vary and haven't stopped; they continue on a daily basis with [killings of students on the numerous checkpoints distributed around the west bank](#), arresting students, demolishing their houses and many other violations.

The international community can pressure the occupation into stopping its hideous crimes: the oppressors should be treated like the apartheid system they are; the occupation should be punished by boycotting Israel - by adopting the BDS call. These will be effective and strong tools; by standing in solidarity with Palestinian students facing oppression on a daily basis, the international community can help to give these students their right to education.

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### **The international academic boycott; a statement from Asia**

Fifty-five scholars and intellectuals, most of whom do work related to South Asia, and four important academic and cultural associations, are among many hundreds of academics from different fields who urge scholars to boycott any official event hosted by Israeli universities, institutions that are complicit with occupation and apartheid. In particular, the signatories of the letter, below, ask that scholars do not attend the workshop on South Asia in World War II to be held this summer at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Among the list of scholars and intellectuals are Aijaz Ahmad, Partha Chatterjee, Githa Hariharan, Jasbir Puar, Nivedita Menon, Tithi Bhattacharya, Junaid Rana, and Najaf Haider.

Our pledge is not to cross the international picket line until “the occupation of Palestine and blockade of Gaza ends, racial inequality inflicted on Palestinians in Israel is terminated, and the Apartheid Wall is dismantled.”

Contact :- Vijay Prashad; Sunaina Maira;  
[sunainamaira@gmail.com](mailto:sunainamaira@gmail.com)

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### **Boycott of an Academic Workshop at Hebrew University.**

Over the past month, Israeli military forces entered Palestinian universities, fired live ammunition, and tear gassed and injured students. At Palestine Technical University- Kadoorie University in Tulkarem in the West Bank, the Israeli military invaded the campus and injured nine Palestinian students. Israeli soldiers also entered Birzeit University on January 11 and closed the gates of this important center of

Palestinian higher education. The soldiers went door to door in the dormitories, harassing the students before abducting Aseed al-Banna, a Student Senate member. The Syndicate of the Palestinian Universities Union has denounced these ongoing incursions and assaults on the right to education. Such is the context for Palestinian students and scholars, trying their best to work under Israeli occupation and under fire.

Furthermore, in fall 2015, many students and youth were killed, arrested, kidnapped, placed in administrative (indefinite) detention, and tortured by Israeli soldiers and settlers. Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, and inside Israel were subjected to a brutal assault by Israel entailing extrajudicial assassinations by soldiers, lynchings by settlers, arson attacks that killed toddlers and families, and daily racist harassment. These are just the latest incidents of violence enacted by the Israeli state that wages wars without impunity and continues to engage and besiege Palestinians.

In the midst of all this, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem is hosting a seminar on “The Indian Predicament: South Asia in WWII” in June 2016. [1]

***We call on all historians of South Asia to boycott this workshop and all such academic interactions with Israeli universities that are complicit with occupation, warfare, and apartheid.***

To attend this workshop at Hebrew University would be to cross the global picket line and violate the call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions from Palestine ([www.pacbi.org](http://www.pacbi.org)). The academic boycott is a powerful tool for scholars to express our principled opposition to occupation, apartheid, and colonization. While all Israeli universities are deeply complicit with the state’s colonial and racist policies (<http://www.usacbi.org/reports-and-resources/>), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is particularly noteworthy because:

- Its Mount Scopus campus is built on Palestinian land illegally confiscated by Israel in 1968. Israel’s unilateral annexation of occupied East Jerusalem and the application of Israeli domestic law to it, are violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and have been repeatedly denounced by the UN Security Council.

- It maintains close ties to the Israeli military industry, which is accused of war crimes against Palestinian civilians; provides special privileges to Israeli soldiers and security personnel; and collaborates with the Israeli army in training officers and recruits.
- It discriminates against Palestinians, including those who are citizens of Israel by in several areas, including not providing teaching services to the residents of Jerusalem in contrast to those provided to Jewish groups; and not offering any courses in Arabic.
- It denies freedom of speech and protest to its few Palestinian students; see: <http://www.aurdip.org/The-Hebrew-University-and-Hasbara.html?lang=fr>

Furthermore, the academic boycott is an act of solidarity with our Palestinian colleagues who are denied academic freedom--it is a denunciation of their condition of *un-freedom*. Israel systematically denies Palestinian academics and students the right to education and the freedom of movement, for they are not able to freely travel for study, conferences, and research, within Palestine and across borders. Palestinian universities have been bombed; schools have been closed; scholars and students have been deported, arrested, and in some cases, killed. Israel also regularly prevents international scholars and students from doing research or studying in Palestine and regulates who can enter its borders to visit Palestinian academic institutions. Supporting the academic boycott is, thus, a call for academic freedom for all, and for an end to the encagement and the *scholasticide* to which our Palestinian colleagues are subjected across the partitioned Palestinian territories.

Finally, we note the irony in the workshop's call for papers that mention the decolonization of India at the end of WWII without acknowledging that India's decolonization occurred as the settler colonial regime was established in Palestine in 1948, the year of the Nakba. There is certainly an interesting discussion to be had about "comprehension, memory, and judgment" of WWII and the role of nationalist struggle that would productively bring historians of South Asia to discuss these questions in Jerusalem. But we cannot do so until the occupation of Palestine and blockade of Gaza ends, racial inequality inflicted on Palestinians in Israel is terminated, and the Apartheid Wall is dismantled.

## Notes

[1] This workshop is sponsored by the European Research Council under the EU- Israel Association Agreement, despite Israel's ongoing and egregious violations of human rights and international law, and has been publicly opposed by hundreds of European academics; see: <http://www.aurdip.fr/european-call-to-defend-the-right-1621.html?lang=fr>

[2] Further information from:-

Association des Universitaires pour le Respect du Droit International en Palestine (AURDIP)

British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (BRICUP).

InCACBI (Indian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel).

USACBI (The US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel)

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## An Open Letter to the United Auto Workers International Executive

### *Respect Union Democracy, Solidarity, and the BDS Picket Line*

As workers, trade unionists, and anti-apartheid activists, we call on the United Auto Workers International Executive Board to rescind its undemocratic and arbitrary "nullification" of UAW 2865's respect for the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions (BDS) picket line, which was overwhelmingly adopted by the 13,000 teaching assistants and student-workers at the University of California in 2014.

### Unfounded Interference

The UAW International Executive Board (IEB) concedes that it could "find no evidence that the local union engaged in any improper actions that may have prohibited a fair and democratic vote." Nonetheless, it sides with anti-labor corporate lawyers to defend the profits of military contractors who arm apartheid Israel. Enlisting in a well-funded witch-hunt designed to silence those who speak up for Palestinian rights, it falsely calls BDS "anti-Semitic." In doing so, the IEB disregards more than a century of



colonialism, ethnic cleansing, and genocide, including Israel's establishment through the dispossession of more than 750,000 Palestinians during the 1947-1948 Nakba (Catastrophe), a regime that veteran South African freedom fighters call "worse than apartheid."

It turns a blind eye to \$3.1 billion a year in U.S. military aid, with which Israel massacred 2200 Palestinians (including 500 children) in Gaza in 2014, and inflicted a 10-year high in Palestinian casualties in the West Bank in 2015.

It refuses to acknowledge more than fifty laws that discriminate against Palestinians with Israeli citizenship. It is deaf to urgent Palestinian trade union appeals for solidarity in the form of support for BDS.

It omits the stated goals of BDS, which demands an end to Israeli occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall; full equality for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel; and implementation of the right of Palestinian refugees to return.

It ignores the endorsement of BDS by Black Lives Matter activists, Jewish members of UAW 2865, and trade unions around the world.

It fails to recognize that BDS is entirely consistent with past UAW support for boycotts organized by the Civil Rights Movement, United Farm Workers, and South African anti-apartheid movement. Lacking any semblance of fairness, the IEB's decision has been appealed to the UAW's Public Review Board.

### **UAW Leaders' Complicity with Apartheid**

In contrast to UAW 2865's highly-transparent support for BDS, the IEB's biased ruling reflects UAW top leaders' longstanding and unaccountable complicity with the racist ideology of Labor Zionism.

In the 1940s, UAW and other top U.S. labor leaders actively supported the Nakba. UAW president Walter Reuther was closely allied with future Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, who later infamously pronounced, "[t]here were no such things as Palestinians."

In the 1950s, UAW conventions passed pro-Israel resolutions and raised funds for the Histadrut, the Zionist labor federation. Reuther's brother,

Victor, served as U.S. spokesperson for the Jewish National Fund, which remains at the forefront of seizing Palestinian lands. In subsequent years, "the UAW may have been the largest institutional purchaser of Israel Bonds," which fund dispossession of the Palestinian people.

In 2007, International UAW leaders signed a statement drafted by the Jewish Labor Committee that attacked unions in the UK for endorsing BDS. Now they seek to disenfranchise UAW 2865 members, muzzle free speech, and demonize the surging BDS movement.

### **Rank-and-File Resistance**

Rank-and-file UAW members have a history of challenging this pro-apartheid stance.

In January 1969, the Detroit-based League of Revolutionary Black Workers publicly condemned Israeli colonialism. On October 14, 1973, three thousand Arab autoworkers in Detroit held a wildcat strike to protest UAW Local 600's purchase - without membership approval - of \$300,000 in Israel Bonds. On November 28, 1973, Arab, Black and other autoworkers struck to protest UAW International President Leonard Woodcock's acceptance of the B'nai B'rith's "Humanitarian Award." UAW 2865's BDS resolution reclaims and revives this proud tradition of solidarity and social justice. When Palestinian trade unions, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and Labor for Palestine issued renewed BDS calls in response to Israel's 2014 Gaza massacre, UAW2865's Joint Council openly informed the entire membership:

"We intend to throw our weight behind the BDS movement to add to the international pressure against Israel to respect the human rights of the Palestinian people. As workers, students, and as a labor union, we stand in solidarity with Palestinians in their struggle for self-determination from a settler-colonial power."

On December 4, 2014, UAW 2865 members adopted this non-binding resolution by a landslide sixty-five percent, thereby becoming the first major U.S. union to endorse BDS.

## Growing U.S. Labor Support for BDS

UAW 2865's courageous vote was paralleled by ILWU Local 10 members who refused to handle Israeli Zim Line cargo in 2014, and has been followed by adoption of BDS resolutions by the United Electrical Workers and Connecticut AFL-CIO in 2015. Attempts to silence this growing solidarity movement are doomed to failure, as reflected in the National Labor Relations Board's recent dismissal of a challenge to the UE's BDS resolution. As the 2865 BDS Caucus explains:

“No letter from the IEB can erase the educational and organizational work we have done over the past year, work we will continue to do, energized no doubt by the IEB's undemocratic, business-friendly attempt to nullify this vote. . . .

“We are part of a growing movement for union solidarity with the people of Palestine and for a democratic and visionary U.S. labor movement. As workers, educators, and students, we know together we can prevail over these forms of repression and continue striving for justice for all peoples.”

Sharing that vision, we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with UAW 2865 in respecting the BDS picket line.

172 initial signatories

## Notices

**BRICUP** is the **British Committee for the Universities of Palestine**.

We are always willing to help provide speakers for meetings. All such requests and any comments or suggestions concerning this Newsletter are welcome.

Email them to: [newsletter@bricup.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@bricup.org.uk)

## Financial support for BRICUP

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One-off donations may be made by sending a cheque to the Treasurer, at BRICUP, BM BRICUP, London, WC1N 3XX, UK or by making a bank transfer to BRICUP at Sort Code 08-92-99

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