

*Canadians for Justice and Peace
in the Middle East*
10090 boul. St-Laurent, Suite 201
Montreal, Quebec H3L 2N7
Tuesday, February 23, 2016
(438) 380-5410

Re: Awaiting your condemnation for my promotion of BDS

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Trudeau

Given that the House of Commons yesterday passed a motion calling the government “to condemn any and all attempts by Canadian organizations, groups or individuals to promote the BDS movement, both here at home and abroad,” I anxiously await your condemnation.

Although I regret that I have not had the opportunity to promote the BDS movement *abroad*, I have done my utmost to promote it in Canada. I note that you are required to condemn “any and all” attempts to promote BDS, so I will list as many of my attempts as I can think of below.

Before I jump into my list of transgressions, however, I thought you might want to know a bit about the BDS movement. Surprisingly, I don’t believe its official, stated objectives were ever actually mentioned during the parliamentary debate on the motion. I simple oversight, I suspect.

The first stated objective of the BDS movement is “Ending [Israel’s] occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall.”¹ It’s almost as if the founders of the BDS movement were reading from Canada’s Global Affairs Website on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where it says, for example:

- “Canada does not recognize permanent Israeli control over territories occupied in 1967 (the Golan Heights, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip). The Fourth Geneva Convention applies in the occupied territories and establishes Israel’s obligations as an occupying power, in particular with respect to the humane treatment of the inhabitants of the occupied territories.”²
- “Canada does not recognize Israel’s unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem.”³
- “Canada opposes Israel’s construction of the barrier inside the West Bank and East Jerusalem which are occupied territories. This construction is contrary to international law under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Canada not only opposes Israel’s construction of a barrier extending into the occupied territories, but also expropriations and the demolition of houses and economic infrastructure carried out for this purpose.”⁴

The second stated objective of the BDS movement is “Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality.”⁵ This is eerily similar to Canada’s Global Affairs commitment to human rights around the world:

- “Canada takes principled positions on important issues to ensure that freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, values that define this country, are enjoyed around the world.”⁶

The third stated objective of the BDS movement is “Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.”⁷ I just double-checked and confirmed that in 1948, Canada indeed voted in favour of Resolution 194. Canada’s consistency on this issue is reflected on Canada’s Global Affairs Website:

- “Canada believes that a just solution to the Palestinian refugee issue is central to a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as called for in United Nations General Assembly resolution 194 (1948) and United Nations Security Council resolution 242. ... This solution should respect the rights of the refugees, in accordance with international law.”⁸

Although I’m still anxious to be condemned, I’m not sure I understand *why* you find it necessary to condemn me, given that the BDS movement is perfectly aligned with Canada’s official policy. I certainly hope that when Parliament debates other laws and motions, the debate is more strongly based in documented facts and positions. Imagine how embarrassing it would be if the House of Commons were debating an energy pipeline, and got the starting and ending locations wrong.

As for my activities promoting BDS, I list the most “egregious” examples here, most of them performed in my capacity as President of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East:

- I instigated the launch of a “Boycott Centre” (http://cjpme.org/boycott_centre) on my organization’s Website in 2010. Here we blatantly promote BDS, and provide all sorts of information and tools to Canadians. For example, Canadians are invited to write letters to local store managers and corporate executives to reconsider their buying decisions in light of Israel’s human rights abuses as documented by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.
- CJPME’s Boycott Centre has a page dedicated to the moral and legal justification (http://cjpme.org/legal_and_moral_justification) of the BDS movement – also surely a blatant “promotion” of the movement.
- I have also overseen the creation of factsheets detailing why, under international law, it is unlawful for Israeli companies to take advantage of Israel’s military occupation of Palestinian territory for commercial benefit. For example, Israeli company Ahava extracts Dead Sea minerals from the shores of the West Bank and sells them as expensive cosmetics. Highlighting violations such as this surely “promotes” BDS.
- My organization and I have also met with a few dozen members of Parliament one day last June to talk about the BDS movement. If you want, I can provide you their names, as you may need to condemn them too. I suspect that parliamentarians seeking to inform themselves about the BDS movement would also constitute “promotion.” But I leave such questions in your capable hands.

While I could continue, I suspect that my “promotion” of the BDS movement as described above is sufficient for your condemnation.

As I reviewed the Parliamentary debate from last week, I saw some of the same questions that we get on our Facebook page. Why, we are often asked, is your boycott targeting Israel alone? There are many reasons, but let me identify a few of the core ones:

- First, we boycott Israel because we have been explicitly asked to do so by the Palestinians. In 2005, over 170 organizations from Palestinian civil society asked the international community to boycott Israel.⁹
- Second, all other attempts over the past 50 years to get Israel to respect the human rights of Palestinians have failed: e.g. dozens of UN resolutions, international peace efforts, decisions by the International Court of Justice, etc.
- Third, Israel’s violations of Palestinian human rights have been going on a *long* time. The first Israeli colony (a.k.a. “settlement”) in the West Bank was built in 1967, soon after Israel

invaded and militarily occupied this territory. In the almost 50 years since, the numbers of Israeli colonists (“settlers”) have increased *constantly* and stand at over 600,000 now.

- Finally, the human rights abuses committed against the Palestinians seem especially dreadful because they are ethnically-oriented. That is, many of the abuses suffered by the Palestinians are the result of Israeli laws established to confer or rescind rights based primarily on one’s ethnicity.

From the above, hopefully it is clear that, whereas other countries have human rights situations that need addressing, the Israel-Palestinian conflict is unique in many ways.

In the debate in Parliament, Members supporting the motion seemed convinced that supporters of BDS were motivated by anti-Semitism and/or a desire to destroy the state of Israel. I suspect many of them have never actually met a supporter of BDS. Please let them know that I would be happy to introduce them to “real live” Canadian BDS supporters, if they so wished. They might be surprised to learn that many of the most ardent supporters of the BDS movement in Canada are Jewish-Canadians.

I have to admit that I am surprised to be facing your condemnation. With your “Real change now” election slogan last Fall, I had quietly hoped that things might work differently in government if you were elected. As you can probably imagine, the Harper Conservatives were pretty tough on people like me: people who questioned their ideology on Israel, womens’ rights, unrestricted trade, and the environment. Nevertheless, with their majority, they never bothered to pass a motion which obliged them to call out and condemn “any and all attempts” by Canadian “organizations, groups and individuals.” Hopefully, this motion is a reflection of your own attention to detail and your ambition to tackle big tasks.

As you can probably imagine, in the face of your opprobrium, I’m feeling pretty vulnerable now. Nevertheless, I’ve realized that being condemned by Canada’s government, merely for supporting the human rights of Palestinians, might be the most admirable thing I’ll accomplish in my life.

So bring it on. Condemn me. I’m ready.

Sincerely,

Thomas Woodley
President, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East

¹ “Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS,” Palestinian BDS National Committee, <http://bdsmovement.net/call> accessed Feb. 23, 2016

² “Canadian Policy on Key Issues in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” Global Affairs Canada Website, Government of Canada, http://www.international.gc.ca/name-anmo/peace_process-processus_paix/canadian_policy-politique_canadienne.aspx?lang=eng accessed Feb. 23, 2016

³ Ibid., “Canadian Policy on Key Issues in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”

⁴ Ibid., “Canadian Policy on Key Issues in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”

⁵ Ibid., “Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS”

⁶ “Human Rights,” Global Affairs Canada Website, Government of Canada, <http://www.international.gc.ca/rights-droits/index.aspx?lang=eng> accessed Feb. 23, 2016

⁷ Ibid., “Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS”

⁸ Ibid., “Canadian Policy on Key Issues in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”

⁹ Ibid., “Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS”