

New Israeli law undermines core freedoms of expression

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

Global Research, July 13, 2011

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) 13 July 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

On the evening of July 11, the Israeli Knesset passed a law that in effect prohibits its citizens from calling for cultural, academic or consumer boycotts of Israel. Under the new law, individuals or organizations urging a boycott may be sued for compensation by individuals or institutions claiming that they could be damaged by such a call. Evidence of actual damage will not be required. The law also applies to boycotts of goods produced in Israel's illegal colonies (a.k.a. "settlements") and of cultural or academic institutions in the colonies. Companies complying with such boycotts will not be allowed to bid on government tenders.

The law has drawn strong condemnation by dozens of prominent Israeli intellectuals, including celebrated writer Amos Oz, and by Israeli human rights and peace organizations. The Association of Civil Rights in Israel said it "will lead to unprecedented harm to freedom of expression in Israel and will bring justified criticism ... from abroad." Peace group Gush Shalom has petitioned the Supreme Court, asserting that the law is unconstitutional and anti-democratic. Within hours of the law's passage, thousands of Israelis had registered their opposition to it via social media.

We urge Canadians and their lawmakers to express their opposition to this draconian law, which limits freedom of expression, virtually forcing Israelis to defend the illegal 'settlement enterprise'," says Thomas Woodley, President of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME). The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits occupying powers from transferring their own civilians into areas that they militarily occupy. However, successive Israeli governments have encouraged Israelis to settle in the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT). The Israeli army has evicted Palestinians from their homes and land to enable the colonists to appropriate them.

The bill passed 47 to 38, although the Knesset's legal adviser attorney Eyal Yanon had informed the MKs that parts of the bill were "borderline illegal." The bill met with strong opposition in the Knesset, including a six-hour filibuster. MK Eitan Cabel (Labor) called it "cowardly" and "another law in a series of fascist laws drafted by the government." MKs from a left-wing party, *Meretz*, the Arab parties and a centrist party, *Kadima*, also opposed the bill. *Kadima* blasted Netanyahu, saying he was "demonstrating ... total capitulation to the extreme right which is taking over the *Likud*."

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