

# Solidarity with the Palestinian People

BDS unites East and West

By [Eric Walberg](#)

Global Research, December 13, 2011

13 December 2011

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

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [History](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

*As people of conscience around the world marked the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, ever new actions help bring Palestinians closer to achieving a state of dignity, says Eric Walberg*

Just in case there was an iota of doubt left in your mind, Israel was officially declared an apartheid state during a session of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine in Cape Town on 7 November.

Among depositions, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights in Gaza cited the Fourth Geneva Convention and the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which prohibits “the transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”

This was just in time to honour the UN-endorsed International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, marked on 29 November to coincide with the anniversary of the UN vote for the Partition Plan, and first celebrated in 1976. Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) activists in 10 European countries staged more than 60 actions as part of a Day of Action calling on supermarkets and governments to “Take Apartheid off the Menu”.

In the UK, 26 November was declared a national BDS Day of Action targetting Britain’s largest supermarket chain Tesco, the only supermarket in the UK that is openly selling illegal settlement goods. Activities ranged from street protests, e-lobbying, relabelling, flash protests and internetworking. While Agrexco may be kaput as Israel’s largest supplier of fresh produce to Europe, Mehadrin has taken its place and was the target of the European Day of Action Against Israeli Agricultural Produce Exporters.

Demonstrators in the US boarded buses run by Veolia to educate passengers about Israel’s apartheid policies. Boston activists launched a campaign challenging the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Rail Company’s contract with Veolia. In Baltimore, activists demonstrated at Penn Station during rush hour, singing a freedom song and drawing connections between the Palestinian and American struggles for equality, linking Veolia’s profiteering from racism and exploitation in Israel/Palestine to the City of Baltimore’s contracts with its own workers.

In a cynical rearguard bid to attract Christmas shoppers, Israel Lobby activists launched Buy Israel Week November 28, hastily put together to counter the growing BDS tide. Luke Akehurst, director of We Believe in Israel, called for two BUYcott days, featuring discount coupons, sponsored by StandWithUs, El-Al, the Jewish National Fund and other such pillars of Israeli apartheid.

While American sympathisers were politely tolerated in their protests against Veolia's transport activities in Israel, their compatriots in Palestine proper were violently arrested for confronting Veolia and Egged, the two major culprits, and targets of BDS activists in Europe.

Inspired by their Western supporters, six Palestinian Freedom Riders emulated the legendary Freedom Riders of the American south of the 1960s, riding settler bus 148 near the illegal settlement of Psagot. Much like those courageous black and white Americans (including many Jews) of yesteryear, the Palestinians were forcibly removed and arrested.

This new generation of Freedom Riders will further inspire Westerners for whom "It is a moral duty to end complicity in this Israeli system of apartheid," according to arrested Hebron resident Badee Dwak. Fellow arrestee Basel Al-Araj minced no words: "The settlers are to Israel what the KKK was to the Jim Crow South — an unruly, fanatic mob that has enormous influence in shaping Israeli policies today and that violently enforces these policies with extreme violence and utter impunity."

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker wrote: "Board the buses to Everywhere. Sit freely. Go into Jerusalem with my blessing. Like many of my country people, I have witnessed this scenario before and know where it can lead. To a straightening of the back and a full breath taken by the soul. Some of us have shed blood, others have shed tears. Some have shed both. All sacred to the cause of the dignity we deserve as beautifully fashioned citizens and Beings of this Universe."

Sadly, as he honoured the Freedom Riders of the 1960s for their courage and dedication fifty years ago, President Barack Obama had no such words for the equally brave ones in Israel today.

In the Arab world, 29 November activities took BDS the logical extra step, with 7,000 Jordanians gathering in the Jordan Valley and marching to the Israeli border to condemn Israel's settlement expansion, calling for the liberation of Al-Quds (Jerusalem), home to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is the second holiest site for Muslims. "We sacrifice our souls and blood for Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Quds," the Jordanians chanted after noon prayers, calling on Jordanian authorities to scrap its peace treaty with Israel.

Even as 100,000s of Cairenes gathered to defend the Egyptian revolution in Tahrir Square 26 November, a rally co-sponsored by Al-Azhar and the Union of Muslim Scholars attended by 5,000 called on Muslims to fight "Jerusalem's Judaisation". Al-Azhar Imam Ahmed Al-Tayeb said: "We are telling Israel and Europe that we shall not allow even one stone to be moved there." Activists chanted: "Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv, judgment day has come."

In other boycott news, a victory for a clutch of brave and principled tennis fans arrested for protesting at the New Zealand Women's Tennis Open last December, which featured Israeli Shahar Peer. After a year of trials, they were finally exonerated in a landmark decision by High Court Justice Paul Heath, who said "Disruption of an individual's enjoyment of a sporting event was not the same as disruption of public order." Quipped a free John Minto, "Annoyance is not a crime, annoyance is part of being in democracy." The judge said it was clear the protest was meant to convey to the tennis player the concerns at the way Israel treated the Palestinian Territories.

In contrast to the tidal wave of Western artists now boycotting Israel-linked events (the Yardbirds just cancelled a scheduled Tel Aviv show), iconic singer and actor Barbra Streisand

performed at a fundraising gala in Los Angeles for Friends of the IDF. Streisand supports OneVoice, which promotes a two-state solution that fails to address structural injustices and has long been discredited. Guests of honour included media magnate Haim Saban and former Israeli Military Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, who commanded the attacks on Gaza in 2008-09 which killed 1,400 Palestinians. An Israeli propaganda video about Streisand's appearance at the gala features armed Israeli soldiers running in a scenic sunset. A shameful sunset in her own career.

In a wonderfully shocking divestment move, Israeli powers-that-be are furious at BNP Paribas for shutting down its operations in Israel. Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer, Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz and Banks Supervisor David Zaken believe the bank's board of directors caved to pressure groups, in the first case in years of a foreign bank leaving Israel. BNP Paribas has had operations in Israel since 2003. The bank claims it sustained serious damage from the Greek crisis, yet the only foreign branch it is closing is its Israeli one.

Unfortunately, as yet, no international governmental sanctions against Israel have been imposed in the past few months. On the contrary, the US continues to oppose attempts to boycott Israel, putting great pressure especially on Arab League states, which officially support BDS. Under US antiboycott legislation enacted in 1978, US firms are prohibited from compliance with any such boycott directly or for a third party, and are required to report any such request to the US Department of Commerce. The WTO is an accomplice, as Israel is supposed to be treated as a Most Favoured Nation by member states.

This pressure has unfortunately had its effect. Morocco and Gulf Coordination Council members, especially Qatar, Bahrain and Oman, acceded to US arguments that boycotting Israel harmed the "peace process" and turn a blind eye to third-party economic relations with Israel and even quietly conduct direct trade.

But the Arab Spring is forcing these truant governments to wake up to their people's demands. And the US showpiece for its vision of the new Middle East — Iraq — doesn't dare end boycott activities, which were the hallmark of Iraqi politics prior to the US invasion.

**Eric Walberg** writes for Al-Ahram Weekly <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/> You can reach him at <http://ericwalberg.com/> His *Postmodern Imperialism: Geopolitics and the Great Games* is available at <http://claritypress.com/Walberg.html>

The original source of this article is Global Research  
Copyright © [Eric Walberg](#), Global Research, 2011

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Eric Walberg](#)

### About the author:

Canadian Eric Walberg is known worldwide as a

journalist specializing in the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. A graduate of University of Toronto and Cambridge in economics, he has been writing on East-West relations since the 1980s. He has lived in both the Soviet Union and Russia, and then Uzbekistan, as a UN adviser, writer, translator and lecturer. Presently a writer for the foremost Cairo newspaper, Al Ahram, he is also a regular contributor to Counterpunch, Dissident Voice, Global Research, Al-Jazeera and Turkish Weekly, and is a commentator on Voice of the Cape radio. Eric Walberg was a moderator and speaker at the Leaders for Change Summit in Istanbul in 2011.

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)