
April 23, 2010

EJJP in Support of UC Berkeley Divest Bill

Dear Members of UC Berkeley's ASUC: We, EJJP a network of Jewish organizations from ten countries in Europe, dedicated to building a just peace, promoting human and civil rights in Israel/Palestine, join the call made to the UC Berkeley Senate to overturn the veto of Senate Bill 118A and to stop investing in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

It has come to our attention that the UC Berkeley student Senate decided to table the decision to overturn the veto to divest from two American companies, General Electric and United Technologies, whose activities materially and militarily support and maintain the Israeli occupation, in violation of human rights and international humanitarian law. We understand that the vote also advises divestment of ASUC and UC assets from companies that a) provide military support for the occupation of the Palestinian territories, b) facilitate the building or maintenance of the illegal apartheid wall or the demolition of Palestinian homes, or c) facilitate the building, maintenance, or economic development of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. We see UC's investments in these corporations as contradictory to UC Berkeley's commitment to international law, and the University community's long-standing commitment to peace, justice and democracy.

As Jews living in various countries in Europe, we know extremely well the difficulties in raising the issue of Israel's crimes, and even more so, demanding boycott, divestments and sanctions against supporters of the occupation. Israel violates human rights every day. These abuses are carried out by the Israeli government and include land theft, arbitrary assassinations, blockades on civilian food supplies, systematic arrests and indefinite detentions of nonviolent demonstrators and targeted destruction of Palestinian farmland and homes. Far from serving to protect Israelis, these actions serve the interests of an Israeli extremist agenda, which, dehumanizes Palestinians, fuels rampant racism, and jeopardizes the safety of both Palestinians and Israelis.

We are aware of the sensitivity of the matter and how many Jews feel threatened or have been targeted by actions focusing on Israeli crimes. We can only encourage every Jew to stand up for the ethical values of Judaism as well as to fight racism in any form it takes.

Further, as Jews, we reject the unsubstantiated argument that criticism of Israel is equal to anti-Semitism. We believe that the opposite is the case. Israel is using anti-Semitism as a tool to silence criticism and avoids having to give argument or reason for its illegal actions. Israel is obviously using the anti-Semitism as a pretext to carry out apartheid-like discrimination against the Palestinians.

Just as various civil rights movements served to strengthen and improve American society, our groups are an integral part of the solidarity/anti occupation/peace movement in Europe, which seeks to change Israel/Palestine into a place where equal

rights are applied to both Israelis and Palestinians. Apartheid in South Africa and the Jim Crow laws in the United States did not end because of silence. They ended because thousands, including students like you, took action and protested. Like South Africa and the United States, we need citizens around the world to stand up and say “NO” to occupation, apartheid and oppression.

We are aware that members of the United States Congress are far behind most U.S. citizens, who recognize that Israel’s illegal behaviors fuel anti-Israeli, anti-Jewish and anti-American hatred throughout the world. That is why outside pressure from grass root movements and NGOs, including students, is needed to reverse the 43-year policy of illegal occupation.

Israel is unlike other countries that violate international law. The U.S. government does not hold Israel accountable for its illegal actions, making efforts like divestment necessary in encouraging corporate actors to do the right thing and in communicating to our political leadership that young people are disenchanted with their governments' support of Israel's occupation.

We therefore urge ASUC to overturn the presidential veto and to remove all corporations that support and maintain the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories from its investment portfolio. Do it for a better Palestinian future. Do it for a better Israeli future.

European Jews for a Just Peace