The Bilbao Initiative – civil society action for justice in Palestine

Final Declaration and Action Plan

31 October 2008

For the past 60 years, the indigenous Palestinian people has been scattered in the Diaspora and fragmented within its homeland by walls and policies of segregation and domination. However, the Palestinian national struggle cannot be divided, and the rights of the Palestinians to return to their homes of origin, enjoy freedom, and exercise self-determination can only be achieved if the root causes of their denial are addressed and if Palestinian national unity is preserved.

During the Bilbao Initiative gathering, we, Palestinian, progressive Israeli and international organizations and social movements discussed and embraced the latest Palestinian in-depth examination\(^1\) of Israel’s legal and political regime over the Palestinian people. This analysis exposes Israel as a state which is built on the massive ethnic cleansing of 1948 and which for six decades has systematically committed injustices against all segments of the Palestinian people – refugees in exile, citizens of Israel and those in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) – on grounds of their national identity, in order to prevent Palestinian self-determination and to cement colonization and domination via racist laws, including promoting exclusively Jewish immigration while barring the Palestinians’ right to return. From a legal perspective, this study has concluded that Israel's regime is a system that uniquely combines apartheid, settler-colonialism and belligerent occupation.

We, representatives of international civil society meeting in Bilbao, agree that the State of Israel must be held legally accountable. By granting Israel impunity for its persistent and systematic violations of international law and fundamental human rights, treating it as an exception above the law of nations, and providing it with unlimited political, economic, scientific, cultural and diplomatic support, the United States, the EU and other players in the so-called international community are guilty of complicity in perpetuating Israeli apartheid and colonial rule. Only by ending this complicity can justice and dignity be restored to the Palestinian people and lasting, comprehensive peace be established in the Middle East.

Furthermore, given the failure of the international community, particularly the United Nations, to recognize and effectively address racism and racial discrimination as a root cause of Israel’s systematic and persistent oppression of the Palestinian people and to counter this oppression, we call upon international civil society at large to shoulder the moral and political responsibility of effectively supporting the struggle to end Israel’s multifaceted injustice, as was done against apartheid South Africa, thereby promoting justice, equality and sustainable peace in a region free of nuclear weapons.

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**Action Plan**

\(^1\) See the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee’s Durban Review strategy paper titled “United against Apartheid, Colonialism and Occupation,” October, 2008.
Assembled in Bilbao on October 31, 2008, we hereby call upon civil society organizations, political parties, networks and conscientious individuals:

(1) To raise awareness about and implement the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Campaign against Israel, based on the 2005 Palestinian civil society BDS call\(^2\), in a gradual, sustainable manner that is sensitive to context and capacity. In particular, we call upon international solidarity movements, social movements, faith-based organizations, unions, NGOs, cultural and academic figures and associations, human rights organizations, and independent legal experts to undertake practical and effective measures to counter Israel’s occupation, apartheid and systematic violation of Palestinian human rights.

(2) To develop and sustain public awareness-raising campaigns to expose the facts about Israel’s regime of apartheid, colonialism and occupation; promote and support the struggle of the entire Palestinian people – in the OPT, Israel, and exile – to attain their right to self-determination, justice, return, and equality as individuals and as a people. To this effect, media organizations are called upon to allow the authentic voices representing Palestinian civil society and supporters of a just peace to be expressed freely, without censorship, distortion or omission.

(3) To demand the compliance with the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice – condemning Israel’s Wall and colonies built on occupied territory – by refraining from providing aid or assistance to Israel or to any of the institutions complicit in its crimes and violations of international law during the implementation of humanitarian and development operations; and hold Israel accountable for damages incurred to infrastructure and services financed and supported by the international community in the OPT.

(4) To act to end Israel’s gradual ethnic cleansing in occupied Jerusalem and its criminal siege of the occupied Gaza Strip, where its illegal and immoral policy of collective punishment against 1.5 million Palestinians may amount to acts of genocide, according to leading international law experts. The collusion of the international community in maintaining the siege must also be exposed and brought to an end.

(5) To build pressure on the United Nations, governments, local authorities, multilateral bodies, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the private sector to suspend cooperation with Israel, with all its complicit institutions and with all institutions that support its occupation and human rights violations, and to investigate their respective compliance with international law and UN resolutions.

(6) To build pressure on the European Union to uphold and respect its obligations under international law and its own human rights standards in its relationship with Israel, in particular by demanding a suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, based on Israel’s grave and persistent violations of its articles 2 and 83.

(7) For independent human rights organizations and legal experts to continue their legal efforts for the prosecution and punishment of Israeli perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity, for reparations for the Palestinian victims, and for accountability of the State of Israel and all parties complicit in such crimes. We urge the exploration of new strategies whereby Zionist organizations, especially the Jewish National Fund (JNF), as well as all foreign companies and governments that collaborate with Israel’s regime of oppression can be held accountable in international courts, including the European Court of Human Rights.

(8) For the Assembly of Social Movements and other international networks in the context of the World Social Forum to endorse the above analysis and adopt the Action Plan in their respective programs of action.

(9) To develop solidarity with all the nations, and particularly the people in the Arab world and other countries in the region that are struggling for freedom, justice and self-determination.

(10) To strengthen the coordination and cooperation among international civil society actors for the purpose of implementing the above clauses of this Action Plan.

\(^2\) [http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/52](http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/52)