JUSTICE IS A UNIVERSAL VALUE: UPHOLD THE RIGHT TO BOYCOTT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Since Donald Trump came to power, his administration has led efforts to repress and intimidate those working in support of the progressive values of freedom, justice, and equality. Recent examples of the rising tide of authoritarianism in the Trump era include the Trump administration’s revocation of the visa of Fatou Bensouda, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court who had called for a probe into possible war crimes committed by U.S. forces in Afghanistan; Trump’s incitement to violence against Rep. Ilhan Omar, a leading progressive voice in Congress, as a Black, Muslim, refugee woman; and the Trump administration’s travel ban on Palestinian leader Omar Barghouti, who has championed the use of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) tactics to hold Israel accountable for its oppression of the Palestinian people.

This repression is part of a larger right wing, racist, and pro-war agenda that the Trump administration has enacted since it first days in office. This agenda threatens every marginalized community and has included the Muslim Ban, violence against immigrants and asylum seekers at the U.S./Mexico border, and doubling down on backing Saudi Arabia’s bombing of Yemen.

In the face of this agenda and its accompanying repression, we need to be even more committed to our demands around freedom, historical justice, and equality for all people, including the Palestinian people. Trump has showcased his particular disdain towards the struggle for Palestinian rights by moving the U.S. embassy to occupied Jerusalem, refusing to hold Israel accountable for its massacre of Palestinians throughout the Great March of Return, and celebrating close ties to fellow right-wing leader and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, who won the recent Israeli election by inciting violence against Palestinians and vowing to annex the militarily occupied West Bank.

In the face of the rising tide of global right-wing repression against movements for justice, it is concerning that most members of Congress, instead of pushing back against Trump’s efforts to ban and intimidate those championing progressive values such as Rep. Omar and Barghouti, are helping instead create an environment that allows these attacks to thrive. H. Res. 246, which currently has 115 Democratic co-sponsors, seeks to condemn Palestinian efforts to hold Israel accountable for long-standing and ongoing violations of their rights through the use of the time-honored tactics of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions. This resolution demonizes the act of boycott, a First Amendment-protected political change tactic vital to historic social justice victories.

Congress must move from complicity in oppression to support for justice. Just as Congress condemned the use of U.S. military aid to Saudi Arabia in harming Yankees, consistent application of progressive values demands Congress condemn the use of U.S. military aid to Israel in harming Palestinians. Instead, H. Res. 246 undermines efforts to work towards human rights and a just peace, and gives the greenlight to Israel to continue its violence against Palestinians.
We have the right to boycott for justice in Palestine, just as we have the right to boycott in protest of gun violence, transphobic laws, racism, and exploitative labor practices, whether perpetrated by the government or companies. Boycotts have been utilized by justice movements across place and time: the Montgomery bus boycott, the boycott of North Carolina over anti-trans legislation, Super Bowl and NBA champions' refusal to visit the Trump White House, consumers urging companies to stop advertising on FOX News over the network’s racism, and municipalities boycotting and divesting from the banks funding the Dakota Access Pipeline and prison corporate profiteers are all prime examples. In the same spirit, the Palestinian call for BDS was inspired by a similar call during the South African anti-apartheid movement, which eventually moved Congress to pass sanctions against the apartheid government of South Africa.

Demonizing the use of boycotts for justice in the case for the Palestinian people fuels racist attacks against supporters of the tactic such as Rep. Omar. There is a global divide today between those who believe in freedom and equality for all, and those who justify racial and religious supremacy. While every struggle for freedom, from Palestine to the U.S., is unique, our values bring us together. Just as a coalition of groups came together in defense of Rep. Omar and successfully advocated to pass a resolution condemning all forms of racism, we call on Congress to protect our right to boycott for justice—without exception.

As progressives, we support freedom and justice and apply those values across the board, without exception. Supporting freedom, justice, and equality for the Palestinian people is an inextricable part of the progressive agenda, while supporting the Israeli government’s ongoing denial of Palestinian rights through separate-and-unequal apartheid policies is an inextricable part of the right-wing agenda.

Congress should be pushing a new progressive vision for the world, one in which all people are free, and in which we uphold justice for all—equal rights, historical justice, and freedom—from the U.S. to Palestine. This includes protecting the right of people to engage in the protest tactics of boycott necessary to achieve this vision, from environmentalists to water protectors to Black Lives Matter activists to immigrant and women’s rights advocates.

With rising authoritarianism and efforts to crush dissent across the globe, we echo the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the reminder of Dr. Angela Davis as we assert that justice is indivisible and that all people have the right to boycott in support of this core principle.

Signed,

American Muslims for Palestine
Arab American Civic Council
Arab Resource & Organizing Center
BYP100 DC
Cambridge Bethlehem People to People Project
Center for Constitutional Rights
CODEPINK
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
Delawareans for Palestinian Human Rights (DelPHR)
Eyewitness Palestine
FITNA - Feminist Islamic Troublemakers of North America
Freedom to Thrive
Friends of Sabeel North America
Green Mountain Solidarity With Palestine
Green Party of New York
Guilford Peace Alliance
Iowans for Palestine
Jewish Voice for Peace
Madison-Rafah Sister City Project
Million Hoodies Movement for Justice
MPower Action
National Lawyers Guild
Palestine Legal
Palestinian Rights Committee of Upper Hudson
Peace Action
Palestinian Youth Movement
Red Nation
Revolutionary Love Project
SIREN
The Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace & Justice
U.S. Palestinian Community Network
United Methodists for Kairos Response
US Campaign for Palestinian Rights
Washington Advocates for Palestinian Rights
WESPAC Foundation, Inc.

Noura Erakat, Human Rights Attorney
Marc Lamont Hill, Academic, Author, & Activist
Molly Crabapple, Artist
Donna Nevel, Jews Against Anti-Muslim Racism
Ahmad Abuznaid, National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC)
Bill Fletcher, Jr., TransAfrica Forum*
Zaina Alsous, Dream Defenders
Remi Kanazi, Poet
Nancy Kricorian, Writer

Michael Yoshii, RCal Nevada United Methodist Church
Professor Hatem Bazian, American Muslims for Palestine
Iyad Afalqa, Arab American Caucus of California Democratic Party”
Lara Kiswani, Arab Resource & Organizing Center (AROC)
Reverend Bonnie Van Overbeke, Bethlehem Partnership United Church of Christ”
Haynes Lund, Bishop’s Committee for Justice & Peace in the Holy Land
Khury Petersen-Smith, Black 4 Palestine
William Hodgkinson, Brandeis Students For Justice In Palestine
Sameena Usman, CA ADEM D25
Cornelius Moore, California Newsreel”
Kathy Roberts, Cambridge Bethlehem People to People Project
Salih Booker, Center for International Policy
Marla Marcum, Climate Disobedience Center
Jack Laun, Colombia Support Network”
Courtney Childs, Corvallis Palestine Solidarity
James Sues, Council on American-Islamic Relations - New Jersey”
Zahra Billoo, Council on American-Islamic Relations - San Francisco Bay Area
Steve Krevisky, Connecticut Peace & Solidarity Coalition
Maria Marroquin, Day Worker Center of Mountain View*
Fadi Saba, Defending Rights & Dissent
Ceceli Lavan, Dominican Sisters*
Sydney Miller, Dorchester People for Peace
Alison Gottlieb, Dorchester People for Peace*
Randolph Urmston, Episcopal Bishop’s Committee (Western WA) for Justice & Peace in the Holy Land
John E. Peck, Family Farm Defenders
Peter Lowber, First Parish Cambridge
Timothy Cordon, First Unitarian Society - Madison Social Justice Ministry
Rasha Mubarak, Florida Young Democrats*
Rev. Donald Wagner, FOSNA
Skip Schiel, Friends Meeting at Cambridge
Gabriel Berger, Georgetown Solidarity Committee*
Ray Doherty, Green Mountain Solidarity With Palestine
Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson, Highlander Research & Education Center
Allyn Maxfield-Steele, Highlander Research & Education Center
Socorro Ramos-Avilés, Iniciativa Acción Puertorriqueña
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Jodi L Melamed, Jewish Voice for Peace - Milwaukee
Lorraine Malcoe, Jewish Voice for Peace - Milwaukee
Sandra Pasch, Jewish Voice for Peace - Milwaukee
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Jamie Jackson, Jewish Voice for Peace Kansas City
Alan Levine, Jews Say No!
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Reverend Sandy J. Damhof, Journey United Church of Christ
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Stanley Heller, Middle East Crisis Committee
Janan Najeeb, Milwaukee Muslim Women’s Coalition
Rachel Ida Buff, Milwaukee Jewish Voice for Peace*
Catherine Murphy, Minnesota Peace Project
Sylvia Schwarz, MN Break the Bonds Campaign
Steve Chandler, Mountain View Housing Justice
Margari Hill, Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC)*
Fatima Saied, Muslim Women’s Organization
Maryum Khwaja, Nasiha Counseling
Huwaida Arraf, National Lawyers Guild, Palestine Subcommittee
Ejaz Naqvi, Northern California Islamic Council
Danielle Lightfoot, NYC DSA, Anti-War Working Group
Korey Wheeler, Organize Florida
Stephanie Porta, Organize Florida
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Rosann Benedict, Seattle Chapter, Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East
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Haitham Salawdeh, US Palestinian Community Network*
Guy Blais, Veterans for Peace
Jim Brasile, Veterans For Peace Chapter 42
Paul Noursi, Virginia Coalition for Human Rights*
Elizabeth Aaronsohn, Professor Emerita CCSU, We Refuse to Be Enemies*
Bonnie Block, WI Coalition to Ground the Drones & End the Wars*
Kate Kizer, ‘Win Without War’
James Bhandary-Alexander, Yale Law School*
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