



5 April 2011

Quakers in Britain agree to boycott Israeli settlement goods

Quakers in Britain have agreed to boycott products from the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The settlements are illegal under international law. Quakers consider that this boycott is a nonviolent move for peace for Israelis and Palestinians. The decision makes clear that Quakers are not boycotting Israel.

Half a million Israeli settlers live illegally in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem). The settlements and infrastructure on Palestinian land are protected by the Israeli government and military and prevent or restrict Palestinians access to their land, water supplies, education, health services and more. Extensive settlement infrastructure divides up Palestinian land, creating obstacles to peace.

Palestinian Quakers are calling for Quakers around the world to consider boycott, divestment and sanctions because of the worsening situation caused by Israel's occupation. The decision was made on Saturday (2 April) by the representative decision-making body for Quakers in Britain, Meeting for Sufferings. The Meeting has not yet considered a Quaker view on divestment and sanctions.

The Meeting heard that most Jewish Israeli peace groups support boycotts of settlement products.

"People matter more than territory" says the minute from the Meeting. And, "We pray fervently for both Israelis and Palestinians, keeping them together in our hearts. We hope they will find an end to their fears and the beginning of their mutual co-existence based on a just peace. And so we look forward to the end of the occupation and the end of the international boycott."

"In the face of the armed oppression of poor people and the increasing encroachment of the illegal settlements in the West Bank, we cannot do nothing," the minute continued.

“We are clear then that it would be wrong to support the illegal settlements by purchasing their goods. We therefore ask Friends (Quakers) throughout Britain Yearly Meeting to boycott settlement goods, until such time as the occupation is ended.”

Quakers consider that this boycott builds on their other nonviolent moves for peace in the region. Since 2002 Quakers in Britain have trained human rights observers for the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). The observers, called ecumenical accompaniers, work with Palestinians and Israelis to promote nonviolence by their protective presence, to monitor human rights abuses and to advocate for an end to the Israeli occupation.

The full text of the minute follows:

Boycott, divestment and sanctions (Israel/Palestine)

Further to minute S/11/02/4 of 5 February 2011, we receive minutes on this matter from the following Area Meetings: Southern Marches (paper S/11/04/mc i a), Sussex East (i b), Surrey & Hampshire Border (i c), Swarthmoor (i f), North London (i g), Cambridgeshire (i h), East Cheshire (i i), Ipswich & Diss (i j), North West London (i k), Bristol (i l), Hampshire & Islands (i m), Devon (i n), Manchester & Warrington (i o) and North Cumbria (i p).

Our assistant clerk has summarised the 14 Area Meeting minutes received, and we have returned to our consideration of the issues raised in the papers received at our last meeting (paper S/11/02/A prepared by Marigold Bentley, Assistant General Secretary of Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW), the Kairos Palestine Document A moment of truth (paper S/11/02/B), and the Quaker Council for European Affairs Discussion Paper entitled Responses to the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (S/11/02/C)).

We have heard of the responses of Jewish Peace Groups within Israel. We hear these Israeli citizens risk being criminalised by their government if they actively support the Palestinian call for cultural and economic boycott. We were informed that most Jewish Israeli Peace Groups support the boycott of settlement goods, and only some support a boycott of Israel.

A just peace for Palestine means security for Israel too, and nonviolent protests by both Israelis and Palestinians for the end of the occupation are heartening to observe.

For nine years Quakers have been witnessing individually and through the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) to the human rights abuses of

the military occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Today we have considered whether we should add nonviolent action to our witnessing – not as punishment or revenge, but as an external pressure to achieve change.

We understand the history and the trauma of the past, but it is Israelis who are the stronger and they need to make the changes.

John Woolman's words (Quaker faith & practice 26.61) remind us of the powerful sense we have of being brothers and sisters with people of other faiths. There are three main faiths in this part of the world, and we want to proceed in ways which allow dialogue to continue. We consider we should now act publically and, well-informed, be able to explain our action to others - because people matter more than territory, and because we approach others with a desire for peace.

Difficult decisions taken by us today can be reversed. The request for boycott comes from those who will suffer most, but a decision for boycott will give hope to Palestinians and support to those in Israel who are working for peace.

In the face of the armed oppression of poor people and the increasing encroachment of the illegal settlements in the West Bank, we cannot do nothing.

Our hearts are full of compassion for Israelis and Palestinians, all of whom are suffering from the effects of the occupation.

We are clear that it would be wrong to support the illegal settlements by purchasing their goods. We therefore ask Friends (Quakers) throughout Britain Yearly Meeting to boycott settlement goods, until such time as the occupation is ended.

We are not at this time proposing to boycott goods from Israel itself, being unwilling to jeopardise continuing dialogue with Israelis and British Jews.

We pray fervently for both Israelis and Palestinians, keeping them together in our hearts. We hope they will find an end to their fears and the beginning of their mutual co-existence based on a just peace. And so we look forward to the end of the occupation and the end of the international boycott. We envisage our future relationship with both peoples as one of loving and generous co-operation.

Although we unite in this decision we recognise that Friends have different views, and we must treat one another tenderly.

ends

Notes to editor:

- For interviews contact Anne van Staveren on 020 7663 1048.
- Approximately 23,000 people attend Quaker Meetings for Worship in Britain, and there are more than 475 Meetings.
- Quakers are known formally as the Religious Society of Friends.
- Meeting for Sufferings has authority to speak on behalf of Quakers in Britain (formally known as Britain Yearly Meeting). It brings together representatives of the 70 Area Meetings across Britain, and the Trustees of Britain Yearly Meeting. About 180 Quakers were present on Saturday.
- The World Council of Churches set up a programme called the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) in response to a call for international help from church leaders in Jerusalem. The aim of this programme is to end the Israeli occupation and bring a just peace based on international law. Since 2002, on behalf of British and Irish churches and church organisations, Quakers in Britain have trained more than one hundred human rights observers for the EAPPI. Read more on EAPPI at www.quaker.org.uk/eappi
- Read more about boycotting produce from the Israeli settlements at www.quaker.org.uk/settlement-produce
- The minute refers to Quaker John Woolman. In 1762 he said: "There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath different names; it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren." (Quaker Faith and Practice 26.61)

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