

MIDI Newsletter #2: An introduction to BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions)

In this newsletter, MIDI choose for the topic of BDS. We hope it will provide a lot of new information for people who didn't know BDS before and it will give new ideas and motivation for those already involved. Please don't hesitate to ask us questions or start discussing BDS. Looking forward to your response,

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1. About the BDS call

The BDS Call (Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions) was issued in July 2005 with the initial endorsement of over 170 Palestinian organizations. The signatories to this call represent the three major components of the Palestinian people: the refugees in exile, Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the subjugated Palestinian citizens of the Israeli state. Meanwhile also some Israeli peace organisations and/or peace activists support this call.

BDS demands the world to boycott Israel, its institutions and enterprises, and also to withdraw its investments in companies that benefit from the occupation or denial of the rights of the refugee population.

At the moment the call is endorsed by hundreds of organisations worldwide.

Please see the official website of the [BDS Movement](#) for more information.

Read [here](#) the official call to boycott from Israeli citizens and Jews from another nationality.

2. Questions and Answers

There are many questions that people ask about BDS.

- Does it work?
- Can individuals really change a political situation?
- What will be the impact on the situation in Israel and Palestine?
- Doesn't it target innocent people?
- What about the Palestinian's working in Israel?

It is good to keep on asking questions and to remain sharp and discuss!

Of course the BDS movement believes BDS will work. A similar boycott campaign was used in case of Apartheid South-Africa. In that case it took decades to see any effect. But still, in the end, there were results. Now, in a time of masscommunication, spreading the call is much easier. Already 4 years after the call, we can see serious results.

About Palestinians working in Israel, Omar Barghouti stated it very clearly on a conference in Bethlehem I attended, in more or less the following words: ‘Yes, we are aware of the risks for Palestinians working in Israel or settlements. Still, the Palestinian organisations issued this call. This means we are ready to accept the negative results, because the alternative is worse. By the way, thank you very much for being concerned about us, but we are adults and very well able to decide what we want to accept.’

Please also refer to the [Q&A section](#) on the BDS site.

3. BDS in SCI

During the MIDI meeting in Bern in April 2009, BDS was discussed at international level in SCI for the first time. It appeared that several branches were already involved in BDS individually and it was decided to create a proposal to get BDS known internationally.

At the North-South platform meeting in October 2009, BDS was discussed in several workshops and plenary sessions. After some good and constructive discussions, some SCI branches decided to write a [recommendation](#) on BDS for the ICM.

Why does BDS fit so well in SCI? Our main objective is to fight situations of injustice in a non violent way. This is exactly what the campaign is about. It is a peaceful, bottom-up campaign that asks individuals to stand up and act and at the same time targets networking between hundreds of organisations, working on justice. It is a call initiated by local organisations and it is also easy to implement on different levels.

We hope that soon BDS will be a well known, worldwide movement and SCI will play its role in it.

4. Which action to choose?

So you like to idea of BDS, but how to start?

- * First of all each branch can [endorse](#) the call on the website

But also if you don't endorse the call fully (or besides endorsing it) there are several possibilities to take action:

- * Discuss BDS in your organisation;
- * Discuss BDS with your volunteers, in workcamps, preparation weekends, etc;

- * Make your workcamps and activities 'BDS proof';
in other words don't use Israeli products in your food and activities;
- * Join a network in your country, working on BDS.
If you need contact details, contact the BDS movement;
- * Organise or join a local boycott action;
- * Publish about BDS on your website, newsletter, magazine, etc;
- * Organise a seminar about BDS;
- * Write to companies investing in the occupation and ask them to stop;
- * Etc, etc....

Some people have problems with a full boycott. No problem! The strenght of the BDS campaign is that every individual and every organisation can work on it on its own level. For example, if you don't want to boycott Israeli avocados, maybe you want to boycott Israeli weapons.... Or companies that help constructing the wall, or protest when an Israeli minister visits your government to promote the occupation...

The Israeli organisation Coalition of Women for Peace started a project to investigate which companies and multinationals benefit from the occupation. It resulted in a great database full of information and a guarantee for fresh boycott ideas.

Please take a look into it at www.whoprofits.org

5. Examples of activities / campaigns

There are many ways of campaigning. Below two examples from VIA-Netherlands. Please send us your reports of activities!

Bathrobe Brigade

A group of young women came together to inform the world about AHAVA, a Death-Sea product created in an illegal settlement (Mitzpe Shalem), in the West-Bank. We copied the idea of CODE-Pink's Stolen Beauty Campaign in the US, but we decided to call ourselves Bathrobe Brigade and to go around in white bathrobes and pink towels on our heads.

We visited several cities in The Netherlands with our whispers about Ahava or in the time of Sint Nicholas, songs about the dirty face-creams. Also we visited several shops, talked to managers and importers and started a big information campaign amongst drug-stores.

This resulted already in questions asked in parliament and a request for an investigation of Ahava by our minister of foreign affairs. This was covered in national media, both in The Netherlands and Israel.

For more information see the [Dutch](#) and the [US](#) campaign (full of nice video's!).

Dutch BDS Campaign

In The Netherlands several organisations joined together in the Dutch BDS Campaign. Our initial strategy is to ask our largest food store 'Albert Heijn' to stop selling Israeli products. We printed post cards, with this request, that people can sign and give to the shopmanager or to us. Every month we stand in front of supermarkets and inform people about BDS and ask them to sign the postcards.

The kick-off of the campaign was in the third week of september, when in 14 different cities activities were held and thousands of signed postcards were gathered.

6. What MIDI branches and partners do

Several SCI branches and partners already implemented BDS in their activities. Below an overview of the involvement of some of the organisations.

Do you support the call or are you thinking about doing this in the future?

- SCI-Catalunya: We support the BDS call
- [Bridges of Peace Jordan: Yes we support the call and we are thinking to do this in the next future.](#)
- VIA-Netherlands: Yes, we signed
- [SCI-Italy: Yes we did support the call.](#)
- SCI-Belgium: WE ALREADY SIGNED THE CALL (we received a form to fill in 2 years ago or 1 and a half year ago) --> from the Belgian BDS support committee
- [Baladna: We did not yet sign, but we are planing \(discusing\) to do so.](#)
- SCI-Hellas: yes
- [Zajel: Zajel is also committed to the BDS](#)

Did you discuss BDS in your organisation?

- SCI-Catalunya: Yes, we have discussed about BDS with our board, volunteers and with the staff of the organisation
- [Bridges of Peace Jordan: yes we discuss BDS in our organization with our members and local partners some times during the meetings](#)
- VIA-Netherlands: Yes, on several occasions and in several meetings
- [SCI-Italy: We discussed it both in our National Council as well as in Assemblies](#)
- SCI-Belgium: YES
- [Baladna: Yes, on several levels and thinking how it is possible to be implent it, take into consideration our specific situation.](#)
- SCI-Hellas: yes
- [Zajel: we support the call to boycott Israeli products and we had debate on this issue on the past two years.](#)

Do you discuss BDS with your volunteers (on workcamps, in preparation weekends or during other activities)?

- SCI-Catalunya: We have discussed about BDS with the volunteers going to Palestine.
- [Bridges of Peace Jordan: some times we discuss BDS in preparation and with the incoming volunteers from out of Jordan who are going to Palestine and Israel.](#)

- VIA-Netherlands: We put BDS on the agenda of our preparation weekend and had a nice discussion. Also we discussed it on some workcamps. On the evaluation weekend there was a bathrobe brigade, see below) integrated in the weekend, in which all volunteers could participate.
- SCI-Italy: [We didn't in the workcamps 2009, we are planning to do it in 2010 workcamps](#)
- SCI-Belgium: SOMETIMES BUT MAINLY IN SCHOOLS (SCI-B is responsible for awareness activities in secondary schools and at the end of each activity we make a small debate and conclusion about what to do to lower injustice/inequalities, etc). Sometimes the Palestinian example and the example of boycott is given (depending on where the debate leads of course). The Belgian Midi group is planning to make some street actions about BDS during 2010 (march or april)
- Baladna: [yes, as long as that will fit the activity, whether with Local or international volunteers](#)
- SCI-Hellas: not yet

Are your workcamps / weekends / activities 'BDS proof' (without Israeli products in meals, etc)?

- SCI-Catalunya: Actually, we don't have so many israeli goods in Spain.
- [Bridges of Peace Jordan: It's Okay if there is any of the Israeli products in meals \(there are many of the Israeli companies in Jordan, they put in their products "Made in Jordan" \)](#)
- VIA-Netherlands: We mention the importance of food and where / how it is produced in our infosheets and in the preparation of campleaders. We promote organic, fair-trade, vegetarian and BDS food. However, we cannot and do not want to force it upon people. Usually our dinners in the office and on meetings are 'BDS'.
- SCI-Italy: [Actually in all SCI Workcamps we try to focus on the importance of critical consumption and sustainability \(political, economical and environmental sustainability\). Therefore we can assume that in most of them there are not Israeli food products, but from next year we will try to be more focused on it, and to raise awareness on the reasons of our choice.](#)
- SCI-Belgium: YES
- Baladna: [As far as possible, as most probably all products is israeli](#)
- SCI-Hellas: normally (not much trade wit Israel anyway...)
- Zajel: [we do not get involved in projects that promotes normalization with Israeli universities or institutions, we do pay attention to boycott the Israeli products during our workcamps and other activities](#)

Are you member of a network working on BDS?

- SCI-Catalunya: Yes, we are an active member of the campaign of entities working with Palestine in Catalunya
- [Bridges of Peace Jordan: Yes we are a member of a networking group which include palestinian members for exchanging information about Emigration.](#)
- VIA-Netherlands: Yes, we joined the Dutch BDS network, that was initiated by the Dutch Palestine Comitee. Also we are active in the Bathrobe Brigade, that focusses on the boycott of Ahava, a Death Sea Product created in an illegal settlement. In total 5 VIA activist are actively involved in these campaigns.
- SCI-Italy: [We are supporting a network about boycotting Agrexco. We are not participating the meetings, but we are in contact, following their activities.](#)
- SCI-Belgium: YES (ABP, CNAPD, ...)
- Baladna: [Yes, Ittijah- Union of Arab NGO's](#)
- SCI-Hellas: no

Did you organise / take part in any BDS actions / campaigns?

- SCI-Catalunya: Yes, we have taken BDS actions within the campaign: the official theme of demonstration against the war in Gaza was Boycott Israel, we took actions against a basket match makabi-barça, and against Noa singing during the national day of Catalunya. We are also involved in the organization of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine in Barcelona (all actions taken by within our commmitment in the Catalonian Palestine Campaign)
- [Bridges of Peace Jordan: Yes, we have taken BDS actions within our symposiums about the Asylum of Palestinians in Jordan](#)
- VIA-Netherlands: Yes, we take part in the monthly BDS actions of the Dutch BDS network and in their

meetings. Also we are active in the Bathrobe Brigade, by joining the research and information work and participating in the actions (in which we go on the streets with flyers in bathrobes and pink towels on our head, to inform the shopping people and to talk to managers of shops who sell Ahava).

- SCI-Italy: We will formally give our support to the Stop Agrexco campaign. We don't know if we will be able to take part in it.
- SCI-Belgium: SIGNED THE CALL AND TOOK PART IN DEXIA BOYCOTT CAMPAIGN IN BELGIUM
- Baladna: Yes, workshops took place with some youth @ Ramallah
- SCI-Hellas: no

Do you provide information about BDS (through your website/ publications / in seminars / presentations)?

- SCI-Catalunya: We provide information about BDS in our seminars about Palestine and we have done it in our newsletter.
- Bridges of Peace Jordan: Yes we do' through some of presentations and seminars
- VIA-Netherlands: Yes, we have information on BDS on our website, we published an article in our quarterly magazine, we had a presentation of the Bathrobe Brigade on our VIA charity festival and we provide information in our personal networks.
- SCI-Italy: We provided information about BDS in our website and in our magazine.
- SCI-Belgium: NOT YET
- Baladna: yes, informing about some activities through our website. Recently we hosted a lecture by Omar Barghouti (one of the founders of the BDS), mainly to share the experience and discussing the possible ways to be done efficiently within "Israel".
- SCI-Hellas: no
- Zajel: This culture should be promoted well and i feel that the Palestinian community is the less boycotting community to the Israeli products, it is a matter of internalized colonialism.