



Canadian Friends
Service Committee
(QUAKERS)

May 14, 2015

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Canadian Quakers call on government to recognize right to nonviolent protest

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TORONTO. Canadian Quakers are not backing away from their [call for a boycott of products made in illegal Israeli settlements](#) in the occupied West Bank.

"We find it deeply disturbing that Canada would sign a memorandum of understanding with Israel labeling the BDS movement 'anti-Semitic'. We wrote to the government about this and the reply was not helpful. We are hoping for clarification from all parties as to where they stand on this memorandum," said Lana Robinson, Clerk of the Canadian Friends Service Committee (the peace and justice agency of Quakers in Canada).

BDS - short for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions - is a movement led by Palestinian civil society and supported to varying degrees by human rights groups, as well as many Jewish individuals and groups. These include Independent Jewish Voices (in Canada), Jewish Voice for Peace (in the US), Boycott from Within (in Israel), and the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network.

"This [BDS] campaign is NOT based on hate," said Eric Schiller, speaking from his perspective as a Quaker and human rights advocate.

"Conversely, it is based on genuine concern for justice and fairness in the difficult situation in Israel and Palestine. I would go further. Rather than being based on hate, this initiative is based on love. It is trying to provide a motivation for the peoples in the region to seriously address the issues between them in a peaceful manner."

Canada signed a [memorandum of understanding with Israel](#) in January which calls BDS "the new face of anti-Semitism".

The memorandum says both countries have "shared values of freedom of expression and assembly, democracy, and the rule of law." However, neither the governments of Canada nor of Israel seem to consider freedom of expression to extend to nonviolent calls for boycott and divestment until social change occurs.

In Israel the "so-called Anti-Boycott Law allows for damage suits to be filed against any person or entity that calls for an economic, cultural or academic boycott of Israel or 'areas under its control,' a reference to the West Bank settlements," according to [Israeli newspaper Haaretz](#).

Public Safety Minister Steven Blaney [told the United Nations](#) Canada would take a "zero tolerance" approach to the BDS movement, the meaning of which remains unclear.

The Canada-Israel memorandum of understanding, which highlights both nations' respect for the "rule of law" also fails to mention Canada's position on illegal Israeli settlements.

Canada's [official policy](#) states, "As referred to in UN Security Council Resolutions 446 and 465, Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The settlements also constitute a serious obstacle to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace."

"If the government made Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions illegal in Canada, it would only increase the efforts of Canadians and others to bring justice to Israel and Palestine," said Carl Stieren, an Ottawa Quaker.

On Wednesday, Quakers [posted a list of Frequently Asked Questions](#) about their positions on Israel/Palestine, following a [CBC story](#) drawing attention to Canada's labeling BDS "anti-Semitic".

Where do Canadian parties stand on attempting to chill criticism of Israel's human rights violations by labeling it "anti-Semitic"?

Quakers have written to seek clarification from the leaders of all political parties about their positions on labeling the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement "anti-Semitic" and how such a claim has possibly been justified.

Quakers have a history of supporting human rights and social justice. This has included their engagement in the [Kindertransport](#), which helped an estimated 10,000 Jewish children leave Germany before and during WWII. Quakers have supported boycotts in the past, such as the one organized by the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa. In 1947 [Quakers were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize](#) for their impartial relief work with the victims of war and famine.

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