

**PALESTINE SOLIDARITY IN CANADIAN UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES:  
OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE ORGANIZING**

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## **COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS**

ASSÉ – Solidarite Syndicale Étudiante  
BDS – Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions  
BNC – BDS National Committee  
CUPE – Canadian Union of Public Employees  
CFS – Canadian Federation of Students  
F4P – Faculty for Palestine  
GSA Carleton – Carleton University Graduate Students’ Association  
GSA Concordia – Graduate Students’ Association Concordia University  
IAW – Israeli Apartheid Week  
OPIRG – Ontario Public Interest Research Group  
PACBI – Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel  
RSU – Ryerson Students’ Union  
SAIA – Students Against Israeli Apartheid  
SJP – Students for Justice in Palestine  
SPHR – Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights  
TCSA – Trent Central Students Association  
UofT – University of Toronto  
URSU – University of Regina Students’ Union  
USACBI – US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel  
UTGSU – University of Toronto Graduate Students’ Union  
UTM – University of Toronto, Mississauga  
UTSC – University of Toronto, Scarborough  
UWO – University of Western Ontario  
YFS – York Federation of Students  
YUGSA – York University Graduate Students’ Association

**Table of Contents**

**INTRODUCTION..... 4**

**ISRAELI APARTHEID AND THE BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, AND SANCTIONS  
MOVEMENT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW..... 5**

**HISTORY OF PALESTINE SOLIDARITY ORGANIZING ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES  
..... 7**

**RECENT MILESTONES OF PALESTINE SOLIDARITY ACTIVISM BY STUDENTS.. 10**

**Israeli Apartheid Week..... 10**

**BDS Endorsements..... 10**

**BDS Implementation ..... 12**

**CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & STRATEGIES OF STUDENT ORGANIZING.... 13**

**Challenges..... 13**

**Opportunities..... 15**

**Strategies..... 18**

**SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR PALESTINE SOLIDARITY ORGANIZING..... 25**

**Recommended reading materials ..... 25**

**Recommended documentaries..... 26**

**Organizational websites ..... 26**

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, university and college students have been among the most active contributors to the growth of an international Palestine solidarity movement. From coordinating pickets and protests, to developing research and materials, students have taken the lead in training activists, engaging faculty and pressing university administrators to cut ties to Israeli Apartheid. However, while sustained and innovative organizing has contributed much to the growth of the global BDS movement, it has also revealed the extent to which administrators, donors and others will try to contain our activism through disciplinary measures, restrictive 'use of space' policies, or in more extreme cases, through the banning of organizations and individuals. Student organizing around Palestine has changed in recent years, as have the demands, resources and strategies of organizers. Reflecting on these changes, and what it means for contemporary organizing, is what this booklet is all about.

This booklet is designed to share experiences, identify challenges and opportunities, and establish best practices so that current and future organizers are able to continue building strong Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) based campaigns on their campuses. Initiated by the Ontario Public Interest Research Groups of Toronto, York, and Peterborough, and the Graduate Students' Union at the University of Toronto, the booklet is based on the actual experiences of student organizers from campuses across North America. To make it as useful and relevant to as wide a spectrum of organizers as possible, the campuses and student groups chosen to participate varied according to geography (large cities, mid-level cities, small cities), campus size (large student population/small student population), student group size (small student organizations to very large organizations), and student organizations type (student unions as well as issue-based groups). Representative(s) from the assembled solidarity organizations were asked to answer a range of questions about various aspects of their organizing experiences. Some of these consisted of past and present representatives from student groups at the following universities: University of Toronto, York University, Ryerson University, University of Regina, Carleton University, Trent University, University of Western Ontario and University of Santa Cruz. The other consisted of an interview with a former representative from the BDS National Committee (BNC) to get a sense of the role that student organizing plays in the global BDS movement. Together, their answers provide a picture of the evolution of Palestine solidarity work, as well as the strategies used by campus groups to further the goals of the global campaign.

## ISRAELI APARTHEID AND THE BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, AND SANCTIONS MOVEMENT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW\*

The state of Israel was established by the Zionist movement in 1948 with the intention and effect of achieving the permanent removal *en masse* of the indigenous, predominantly Arab population of Palestine for the purpose of Jewish colonization and development of a Jewish state. The *widespread and systematic* manner in which Israel has since violated international human rights and humanitarian law and defied UN resolutions, as well as the manner in which Israel has *institutionalized* its policy of ethnic cleansing – through discriminatory martial and civil law and administrative mechanisms – supports the conclusion that Israel’s current regime over the Palestinian people should be characterized as a *system combining apartheid, occupation and colonialism*. Apartheid refers to a social system that separates and discriminates against people based on race or ethnicity when that system is institutionalized by laws or decrees.

The backbone of Israel’s apartheid is formed by a set of discriminatory laws, including the 1950 *Law of Return* (1950), *Absentee Property Law* (1950), *Citizenship Law* (1952), *World Zionist Organization-Jewish Agency “Status” Law* (1952), the *Jewish National Fund Law* (1953), and Basic Law: Israel Lands (1960), which reserve the full rights of “nationals” in Israel to the state’s Jewish citizens and confers public status on Zionist “national” institutions which work for the exclusive Jewish benefit. The same laws exclude the 1948 Palestinian refugees from citizenship, confer second-class citizenship on Palestinians who have remained in Israel, facilitate confiscation of Palestinian land and its transfer to Jewish ownership, and bar Palestinian restitution claims. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) since 1967, Israel has used its authority as the Occupying Power for establishing a similar apartheid regime by means of military orders. The apartheid-character of Israel’s rule in the OPT is amplified by the fact that Israeli civil law is applied to the (*de facto*) annexed Jewish settlers and colonies, whereas martial law is applied to the occupied Palestinian population.

Israeli Apartheid in turn has denied Palestinians their fundamental rights of freedom, equality, and self-determination through ethnic cleansing, colonization, racial discrimination, and military occupation. Despite abundant condemnation of Israeli policies by the United Nations, international bodies, and preeminent human rights organisations, the world community has failed to hold Israel accountable and enforce compliance with basic principles of law. And, Israel’s crimes have continued with impunity.

In view of this continued failure, Palestinian civil society called for a global citizens’ response. On July 9 2005, a year after the International Court of Justice’s historic advisory opinion on the illegality of Israel’s Wall in the OPT, a clear majority of Palestinian civil society – consisting of over 170 Palestinian political parties,

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\* This brief overview has been reprinted from various sections of <http://www.bdsmovement.net>.

organizations, trade unions and movements – called upon people of conscience all over the world to launch broad boycotts, implement divestment initiatives, and to demand sanctions against Israel, until Palestinian rights are recognised in full compliance with international law.

The campaign for boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) is shaped by a rights-based approach and highlights the three broad sections of the Palestinian people: the refugees, those under military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Palestinians in Israel. The call urges various forms of boycott against Israel until it meets its obligations under international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967 and dismantling the Wall;
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

Since 2005, a growing number of civil society organizations and people of conscience from all over the world have endorsed the BDS campaign. They include politically progressive individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and represent a wide range of sectors including labour, social justice, and student movements.

## **HISTORY OF PALESTINE SOLIDARITY ORGANIZING ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES**

Palestine solidarity organizing on North American university campuses has a long and vibrant history. Prior to the launch of Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) in 2004, and the call for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) in 2005, Palestine solidarity organizing on campuses focused on ending Israel's occupation of the territories captured in 1967. Here, solidarity organizing, and the discourse that framed it, was based around the project of ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in the name of Palestinian human rights. In the Canadian context, this strain of student organizing can be traced back to 1999 when several Montreal-based solidarity organizations unified, and later expanded, to form Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR). This was the organization that, working in close collaboration with progressive students inside the Concordia Student Union, organized one of the first successful student protests in support of Palestinian human rights, forcing the cancellation of a speech that then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was due to give at Concordia University in 2002.

By 2004–2005, however, the focus of the solidarity movement, and the discourse that framed its work, began to shift. The first IAW and the call for BDS broadened the analysis of the question of Palestine away from an exclusive focus on the occupation to one that began to look at the system as whole. They helped to re-orient the focus of student organizing to one with an analysis of Israel as an apartheid state, presented overarching goals to be working towards through the 3 demands of the BDS movement and provided a concrete strategy with which to do solidarity work. The BDS call provided a method of supporting the popular Palestinian struggle for liberation, and because of its representative character, it also provided a clear mandate for those engaged in solidarity organizing. It shifted the focus of solidarity work to one of building specific, concrete and effective campaigns relevant in different contexts, and in so doing, moved the struggle beyond the more symbolic forms of protest undertaken in the recent past.

Just as the BDS call provided a clear mandate and method to effective solidarity organizing, the growth of Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) helped to frame Palestine solidarity organizing around the concept of apartheid and the need to mobilize against it. First organized by the Arab Students Collective at the University of Toronto in 2005, Israeli Apartheid Week quickly spread to other universities across Canada, the United States, and the world. In 2014, for example, IAW was held in at least 154 cities. A foothold in the universities provided both a forum for the apartheid analysis to grow, an audience, and the growth of an emerging network of activists across different social sectors. In 2006, for example, student activists from UofT and York University, along with community members from the broader Greater Toronto Area came together to establish the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA), an organization which included progressive representatives from the labour movement, arts communities, faculty members, and high-school students. Coming together in this coalition enabled student activists to connect with, strategize, coordinate and support Palestine solidarity work in

other sectors. The potential of this approach was quickly realized when union members inside CAIA, working closely with union locals representing teaching and graduate assistants, as well as contract faculty, held successive cross-educational workshops, shared resources, and built the critical mass necessary to have local 3903 of CUPE – the union representing Teaching Assistants, Graduate Assistants, and contract faculty members at York University – pass a BDS resolution several months after the organization’s foundation.

This period also marked a sharp increase in endorsements of IAW by other progressive social justice-oriented student organizations. The broad framing of the Palestine question allowed student organizations, such as the Students Against Israeli Apartheid (SAIA) at UofT, York, and Carleton, and SPHR at Ryerson and other campuses to connect issues of systemic discrimination and Israeli Apartheid to related issues closer to home. Because Israel depends so much on external - particularly western - support for its policies, extensive work was done with individuals in feminist, environmental, anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and queer organizations, showing how different communities were implicated in and affected by the different dimensions and processes of settler-colonization in Israel and North America. This paved the way for a much broader working relationship with other social justice oriented student groups, reinforcing Palestine solidarity work, but also bolstering local efforts and movements related to issues of indigenous solidarity, environmental justice, queer struggles, and other progressive causes. The student-levy based Ontario Public Interest Research Groups at UofT and York became a very useful ally for the two SAIAs, who frequently found it difficult to navigate hostile university administrations. OPIRGs, in turn, began to house SAIAs as ‘action groups’ as a way to integrate Palestine solidarity into its progressive politics and provide a safer space for organizers to collaborate with other progressive students working on similar or related work.

Cross movement alliances with other progressive student groups proved easier than building alliances with student unions themselves. Many student unions in early 2000s were wary of working too closely with BDS oriented student groups. This had to do in part with a lack of political will, but also a genuine lack of knowledge of Israeli Apartheid and the BDS movement. One of the ways in which Palestine solidarity organizations attempted to bridge the divide between student unions and progressive student activism was to engage in the ‘Palestinian Right to Education’ campaign which aims to highlight the obstacles Palestinians under Israeli occupation face in their pursuit of education. This campaign helped focus minds on the practical effects of occupation, while serving as an entry point upon which to engage a wider group of the student body, in addition to student union executives, on matters relevant to them. This helped establish Palestine solidarity as not only a ‘Palestinian issue’ but a ‘student issue’, and paved the way for building alliances that would, in a few years, set the precedent for supporting increasingly more ‘pro-BDS’ work in unions.

Since 2004-2005, the struggle to push student unions to adopt BDS resolutions has intensified on campuses both around the world and here in Canada. This has led to the formation of more BDS oriented student groups, an increase in coordinated actions and events, and a coordinated effort to win over student unions – such as the many locals inside the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) that have yet to pass resolutions – who continue to distance themselves from BDS and Palestine solidarity work. In this, it is important to note that the Canadian student movement lags behind other national student unions such as the UK National Union of Students, which after extensive effort by Palestine solidarity activists finally voted to endorse BDS against Israel in the summer of 2014.

## **RECENT MILESTONES OF PALESTINE SOLIDARITY ACTIVISM BY STUDENTS**

The call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) has grown louder and more urgent amidst policies of settlement expansion and the intensification of each military assault on Gaza. In terms of student activism, this has led to the growth of the number of Israeli Apartheid Weeks (IAWs) being organized internationally, new endorsements of the global BDS campaign, and increased efforts to implement BDS in diverse and creative ways.

### **Israeli Apartheid Week**

IAW is an annual international series of events held in cities and campuses across the globe. The aims of IAW is to educate people about the nature of Israel as an apartheid state, 'mainstream' the discourse of apartheid, and build a strong anti-apartheid movement by building momentum for BDS. Having started in Toronto, Canada a decade earlier, 2014 saw the more than 154 cities around the world organizing IAW events.

In the decade since 2004 there has emerged a strong literature which has sought to document and challenge Israeli apartheid, including reports issued by major international bodies and human rights organizations in addition to the published findings of political leaders, academics, and activists (key literature may be found at the end of this booklet). Many of these efforts have highlighted the role that could be played by people and governments to increase pressure on Israel to abide by the standards of international law. Prominent Palestinians, Jewish anti-Zionists, and South Africans have been at the forefront of this struggle.

If you are thinking of organizing an activity for IAW on your campus, take a look at the official website and check out the Basis of Unity, examples of past programs in different cities, and ways to network with other solidarity activists near you: <http://apartheidweek.org>.

### **BDS Endorsements**

Since 2005, student-led Palestine solidarity organizations have pushed, and worked collaboratively with, student unions on their campuses to endorse and join the global BDS campaign. This has included tireless efforts on the part of Palestine solidarity groups on campuses to educate the student body, their student union executives, faculty and staff members about Israeli Apartheid and the BDS campaign. It has also taken years of hosting speakers and public forums, creating educational resources, organizing film screenings, coordinating rallies and sit-ins, collecting signatures, among other actions.

One of the first steps taken by student groups to officially sign on to the campaign has been to formally adopt a BDS motion. This allows an organization to institutionally commit themselves to furthering the demands of the campaign. The demands are based upon a July 2005 call from over 170 Palestinian civil-society organizations calling for a broad-based campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully comply with the precepts of international law by:

- Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands, dismantling the Wall and freeing all Palestinian and Arab political prisoners;
- Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
- Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN General Assembly resolution 194.

In Canada, at least 11 student unions have now endorsed the BDS motion:

- Ryerson Students' Union (April 2014)
- University of Toronto Scarborough Campus Students' Union (April 2013)
- York University Federation of Students (March 2013)
- Trent Central Students' Association (February 2013)
- University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union (February 2013)
- Concordia Graduate Students' Association (January 2013)
- University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union (December 2012)
- York University Graduate Students' Association (November 2012)
- Graduate Students' Association at Carleton University (March 2012)
- University of Regina Students' Union (February 2012)
- Solidarite Syndicale Étudiante (ASSÉ) (October 2007)

In addition to the 11 listed student unions, the McMaster Students' Union and University of Windsor Student Alliance also held campus-wide referendums where the majority of the student body voted to endorse the campaign. However, these were later overturned by university administrators and the fight to have students' voices heard still continues.

As is evident from this list, the majority of BDS success has been concentrated in Ontario. These include campuses from very large universities to smaller ones. These successes have held pave the way for the Ontario chapter of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS-O) to adopt the BDS resolution in August 2014. Beyond Ontario however, there are currently very few student unions that have been able to bring forward BDS motions and endorsements.

## **BDS Implementation**

In addition to working with their student unions to endorse BDS motions, Palestine solidarity groups have gone on to actually implement them.

Across North America and Europe, students have been developing sophisticated and popular campus divestment initiatives, demanding that their universities divest from companies, research institutes, and programs complicit in Israeli Apartheid. This has entailed a significant amount of work, including extensive research into their university's investments, establishing working relationships with supportive faculty and staff for support, and educating the student body about the campaign itself. In the UK, student mobilizing has succeeded in ending relationships between different universities and BDS targets, including companies such as Ahava and Eden Springs. In Canada, groups such as the Students Against Israeli Apartheid (SAIA) at the University of Toronto, York University and Carleton University have all launched divestment campaigns.

For other student groups and unions who have yet to develop divestment campaigns, it has meant concerted efforts to educate the student body about Israeli Apartheid and BDS, enlist the support of other politically and socially progressive student groups, developing strategies for resisting backlash by Zionist students, faculty, and administrations, and keeping the momentum of Palestine solidarity on campus going all year round. For campuses with Palestine solidarity organizations with smaller capacities, BDS implementation has mainly meant commitment to hosting Israeli Apartheid Week events and/or other awareness raising events throughout the year.

BDS activists in different campuses, most of who are involved in organizing Israeli Apartheid Weeks, connect, collaborate and share resources and ideas as needed over national organizing lists. Here, strategies on how to deal with media, administration and opposition backlash are exchanged to make solidarity experiences of newer organizers a little easier.

## **CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, & STRATEGIES OF STUDENT ORGANIZING**

While successful Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) events and Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) votes point to progress on Canadian campuses around Palestine, it does not mean that it has been smooth sailing for student organizers. As student representatives have documented, they have faced a wide array of ongoing (and at times escalating) challenges that they have had to navigate, and have worked to seize any opportunities presented to them. These challenges have ranged from external repression on the part of national and provincial governments, on- and off-campus Zionists groups, university administrations, and apathetic student populations and movements. Given the very limited resources student groups have, they have used different strategies to fight back in simple, yet effective ways.

### **Challenges**

#### Repression and backlash: Canadian and provincial governments, university administrations and Zionist presence on campuses

The Canadian government is one of the most pro-Israel governments in the world. This is especially true of the current Conservative government, but also a feature of previous Liberal governments, as well as the current leaderships of the Liberals and NDP. As a consequence, the climate of BDS organizing has been an especially hostile one. For example, Jason Kenney, then former Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, issues an annual statement, condemning IAW and suggesting that it “[operates] under the guise of academic freedom ... [it] is a misleading attempt to delegitimize and demonize the only true liberal democracy in the Middle East. IAW’s organizers choose to promote inflammatory propaganda over civil and enlightening debate. Their approach is at odds with the Canadian values of tolerance and mutual respect, and prevents meaningful dialogue from taking place.” In 2010 the Ontario Legislature unanimously passed a motion brought forward by a Conservative MPP to condemn Israeli Apartheid Week, arguing that it constitutes hate speech. The motion, voted on by members from all three parties, was an attempt to ban the term ‘Israeli Apartheid’ so as to undermine the ability of students to put forward the apartheid analysis. Similar attempts have been made in recent years to ban the pro-BDS group, Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QUAIA) from taking part in Toronto’s annual Pride events. In addition to these attempts to institutionally shut down anti-Apartheid activism, there are the constant psychological and physical threats to activists by Zionist students and off-campus organizations, such as by the Jewish Defense League.

Not surprisingly, condemnation and attempts to shut down IAW and BDS activism has led to severe repression from university administration, Zionist faculty and students on campuses. These range from prohibition from using the term ‘Israeli Apartheid’ (McMaster University, 2008); to the banning of IAW events for displaying a map of historic Palestine (University of Western Ontario, 2005); outright bans of IAW posters on

campuses (Trent University, Carleton University and University of Ottawa, 2009); administrative sanctions, fines, expulsion and the de-ratification of solidarity groups from campus life (SPHR-Western, 2005; York University, 2013); in addition to the condemnation of a graduate student engaged in critical scholarship and activism by national MPs and provincial MPPs (University of Toronto, 2010). These are just a few examples of the more egregious forms of repression that various Palestine solidarity groups and student activists have faced over the years. They do not include the sometimes daily harassment, threats of violence, or actual physical violence that has been committed against activists by Zionist students. Nor do they include the ongoing policing of all Palestine related events on campus by university administrations (and the subsequent fines that are incurred for the unsolicited security), or the difficulties associated with booking campus space for meetings or publicized events. Room bookings are consistently cancelled by university administrations (often at the very last minute), making it very difficult, and sometimes impossible, to do any outreach for events.

#### Internal challenges: organizational capacity and sustainability

The constant need to focus on and prepare for the potential reaction of adversaries has meant that the time, energy and resources that would have otherwise been directed to actions, outreach and/or educational work has instead been diverted to a time consuming and often draining defensive politics. As a consequence, many of the most experienced students – particularly those who have been around the organizing scene the longest – are often stretched thin. Similarly, the more experienced student activists tend to be in their upper years of undergraduate studies, which when combined with the pressures of courses and graduation, has led to the erosion of organizational time dedicated to building capacity, to say nothing of the potential ‘activist burnout’ – leaving an organization because of an inability to devote enough time to lives outside of activism. This can very easily lead to the organization ‘losing steam’ and its work being stalled for sometimes long periods of time. An organizer from SAIA York, for example, noted that despite working so hard to launch the divestment campaign, losing momentum remains a crucial problem.

Similarly, the nature of the opposition – coming from government, university and other quarters – has also meant that many students who are often interested or eager to do Palestine solidarity work shy away from it for fear of intimidation, or worse, expulsion. New members meetings, held to introduce new students to the group and the work itself, are sometimes disrupted by Zionist students who are eager to learn about the strategies and plans for Palestine solidarity work on campuses so they can organize against it. Similarly, since BDS organizing is depicted as ‘too radical’ by both on- and off-campus media, many students are uncomfortable with the prospect of actively doing Palestine solidarity work, opting instead to join ‘safer’ options such as the innumerable human rights or poverty eradication organizations available on campuses. In most cases, these challenges tend to dampen the internal capacity of Palestine solidarity

groups and prevent the effective transfer of knowledge and experience to the next generation of students and activists. In other cases – for example, at Trent – where students used these other groups to first gain organizing experience/ confidence before switching to Palestine solidarity work, it also negatively affected the potential ally organizations.

### Limited access to information

Building a divestment campaign on campus is a long term project – one that can take many months to launch. For example, the joint SAIA York and UofT divestment campaign took ten months to develop, in part because that is just how long it took to do the required research on university investments, and strategize around potential BDS targets. A big part of why it takes so long to conduct this research is because it is often very difficult, particularly for students, to get a hold of information on the university's pension funds and other investments.

### Lack of funds

Pro-BDS student groups consistently have little to no funds with which to organize. However, the costs associated with printing charges, room booking fees, purchasing tickets and booking accommodation for speakers, and paying for legal advice quickly add up. Because of this many student groups have to organize fundraising drives before they are able to organize week-long events (for example, UC Santa Cruz Committee for Justice in Palestine), solicit donations from supportive faculty, OPIRGs or other organizations, or co-host events on a single campus (SAIA York, SAIA UofT, SPHR Ryerson). Co-hosting events on a single campus, while efficient in terms of cost, does have its downsides. It may, for example, mean that it is the organization at the host campus that captures more of the new volunteers and momentum of an event. For cities where one or more campuses are outside of the downtown core (for example, UTSC, UTM, and York in Toronto), it also means that hosting an event at the most centrally located campus may exclude or not be accessible to those students. Another issue is of who to invite. We all want to draw people to our event and that usually means trying to secure a well-known speaker. A lack of funds sometimes results in having to invite speakers who are not as well known, making it difficult to do outreach to students who are otherwise unfamiliar with BDS or Palestine solidarity work in general.

### **Opportunities**

Despite the many challenges of Palestine solidarity organizing in Canada, there have also been a number of opportunities that have allowed activists to further the BDS movement and achieve the significant milestones discussed earlier. Many of these opportunities were the direct result of the hard work by activists in other/international settings, and many more have derived from the efforts of students and local campaigns.

### Mass endorsements of BDS by student unions and academic associations, nationally and internationally

The surge in BDS resolutions adopted by student unions and academic associations in the last few years has found resonance in Canada as well. Palestine solidarity groups pushing their student body and student unions to sign petitions and adopt BDS resolutions found it useful to cite the number of their international counterparts who had made the conscious transition to institutionally support BDS, as a means to motivate and lend support to their own organizing. Similarly, as more and more campuses in Canada pass a resolution, the less 'controversial' it becomes to those who are 'on the fence' or have liberal/left liberal politics. The adoption of BDS resolutions by academic associations such as American Studies Association (ASA), the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS), the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), and most recently, the Critical Ethnic Studies Association (CESA), has been especially helpful for student organizing, as it lends 'credibility' to have established academic associations joining the BDS movement.

### Treating student unions, labour unions, and faculty members as potential allies

Whereas earlier, BDS-oriented solidarity groups tended to work outside of the student union structure, increasingly, these groups are seeing the benefits of treating them as potential allies. While the surge in BDS resolutions nationally and internationally set the precedent for bringing up the discussion at student union annual general meetings or council meetings, what tended to be decisive was the support of key executive members inside the student body in question. This was particularly true in the organizing experience at Trent where the Peterborough Coalition for Palestinian Solidarity had supportive allies in the executive committee of the Trent Central Students Association (TCSA), which helped to steer the motion through. Similarly, graduate students in SAIA York ensured that they worked closely with key executive members and staff at the York University Graduate Students Association (YUGSA) in identifying speakers, drafting the wording of the motion, and arranging for supportive graduate students to attend and participate in the key YUGSA Council BDS discussion and vote. Moreover, when SAIA York was banned as a group, they worked closely with all student and labour unions on campus that had passed the BDS motion (York Federation of Students, Graduate Students' Association, and CUPE 3903), as well as respected faculty members to hold York University accountable. SAIA York also frequently seeks out support from these campus unions for help with moving forward their divestment campaign. This includes, in association with allies in different student organizations, identifying students who sit on the different administrative bodies of the university, such advisory committees on responsible investing, for example, requesting meetings, presenting information, and so on. In making use of the opportunities that already exist for alliance building and pressuring administration 'from below', SAIA York has been able, in recent years, to conduct its work and achieve important victories through some of the administrative structures already in place.

Broadening support and building alliances with student/ labour unions and faculty members entail a lot of groundwork and preparation, and solidarity organizers need to be fully prepared for the continual and ongoing nature and purpose of alliance building. A representative from Trent notes for example that in the lead up to the decisive BDS vote, solidarity organizers became fully reliant on 'key allies' and did not spend adequate time on building mass support. This meant that while the BDS motion itself passed, the campaign itself lost momentum because there was little collective strength to implement the goals of the campaign once the motion was passed. It is important to not lose sight of the goal of building a collective, and popular, movement that is not dependent on the presence of a handful of allies.

#### Aligning events to major dates and building Days of Action

Being plugged into the wider BDS movement means that most Palestine solidarity groups are aware of, and make a conscious effort to collaborate on, events for key Palestine 'Days' or 'Weeks' of action. This includes sharing speakers or cost-sharing for film screenings and other events for Israeli Apartheid Week, Week Against the Wall, Prisoners' Day, Land Day, Nakba Day and more. These coordinated efforts present significant opportunities for groups with particularly small budgets and capacity to organize entire events by themselves.

#### Collaborating with other social justice organizations, on- and off-campus

Student groups are increasingly realizing the benefits of cross-movement collaborations as well as collaborations with off-campus groups. For example, in Toronto, IAW organizers have reached out to the Toronto Palestine Film Festival to collaborate on film screenings, to the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty on issues of housing, Queers Against Israeli Apartheid on the politics of pink-washing, as well as No One is Illegal and others. This has allowed organizers to reach a wider support base, beyond those sympathetic to Palestine solidarity strictly, and engage them in anti-Apartheid and BDS work, in mediums that already interest them.

#### Innovative outreach techniques

Palestine solidarity outreach has always been extremely difficult. Whether it is posters being torn down or banned, leaflets being destroyed, or informational tabling sessions being disrupted by Zionist students, outreach is something that has had to evolve. Increasingly, these student groups are taking to social media to do outreach. Whether it is creating and sharing events on Facebook, tweeting the latest BDS victories on Twitter, or uploading videos of the latest creative action on YouTube, most student groups find these means of communicating with the student body useful in complementing the face-to-face education work undertaken at campus informational tables (usually set up in the busiest parts of the campus) where with educational materials like booklets, flyers, posters, and buttons are discussed and distributed. Worthy of note however, is that most organizers agree that social media and technology alone cannot, and should not, replace the in-person engagement of students.

## Strategies

### Well-researched, fact-based organizing

Palestine solidarity groups have long recognized the importance of well-researched, fact-based organizing. For example, SAIA-Carleton, York and UofT, in their preparation for developing divestment campaigns, conducted extensive research on companies that their respective universities' pension funds invested in. This research is often done with the help of supportive faculty members who are able to request the necessary list of companies, and can take several months. The strategy used for divestment campaigns is to identify companies that are actively involved in significant violations of international humanitarian law, including breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention amounting to war crimes, and to see if the university has any responsible investment policy or committee in place. For some SAIA's such as the one at UofT, significant discussion also went into deciding how to frame the issue of divestment (for example, on whether to broaden the call for divestment to include companies responsible for comparable violations of human rights in other parts of the world). The work involved in the process of research, discussion, production and presentation of the final divestment report, while long and lengthy, nonetheless pays off as subsequent solidarity groups often use the assembled material as reference documents. It also helps strengthen relations between different solidarity groups.

For solidarity organizations that are not yet in a place to launch divestment campaigns, this fact-based approach to BDS and Palestine solidarity is essential. The vast amount of factsheets, pamphlets, booklets, posters and videos that are now available from various websites (also listed at the end of this booklet) are extremely helpful for doing outreach, and for showing the student body that Palestine solidarity is not based on mere 'ideological' propaganda. They are often also reproduced, sometimes with campus-specific information listed, and used for outreach and internal member education.

### Increased coordination of campus organizing nationally and internationally

The 2005 BDS call has led to the increased coordination of BDS related activity, linking campus organizers together nationally, and internationally. For example, the first student-led BDS U.S. national conference was held at the University of Pennsylvania in early 2014 following a successful national student conference at Columbia University in 2013. Similar IAW strategy meetings are organized in Canada, often in advance of annual or country-wide events. These conferences and meetings bring activists together to strategize collectively on best practices, develop resources and better develop long-term plans. This has allowed student groups to focus on building a stronger, more coordinated, and ultimately more united BDS movement.

As SAIA York points out, a key thing to keep in mind when collaborating and learning from other groups is that it is not enough to just replicate the work of other groups, since each city and each university presents an entirely different context. An approach

that may work on a large campus, such as York, may not be as effective on a small rural campus, such as Trent. It is more important to learn from and discuss the experiences of different campuses and of the strengths and weaknesses of their past efforts. This is precisely why the annual cross-Canada IAW meetings have been so helpful – they have been opportunities to reflect on the work each campus had done, to discuss what would and would not make sense to try on different campuses, and to share resources/new ideas.

#### Pro-active organizing: learning from the past, building for the future

After almost a decade of BDS organizing, and the subsequent experiences of repression and backlash, student organizers have learnt to anticipate attempts to counter the growth of solidarity work. Having collectively shared these experiences with each other, they have begun to factor these potential responses into the way they go about organizing, framing, and developing programs for internal education, and public events, and tactics to challenge and resist the backlash.

For example, experiences of IAW in all campuses have been shown that there will be varying degrees of Zionist student disruptions during the event itself. These disruptions have ranged from: disrupting hosted speakers; intimidating and harassing attendees outside of the event location; accusing event organizers of hosting anti-Semitic events and supporting hate speech, or ‘one-sided’ events; harassing women organizers; submitting articles to campus newspapers, and labelling IAW and other Palestine solidarity as creating a ‘threatening’ atmosphere for Jewish students. Whereas earlier IAW organizers spent much time responding to these tactics, activists today work toward pre-empting these disruptions. The methods employed include: training sessions for marshalls and event chairs on how to respond to a crisis (preferably by referring to the university’s own policies); enforcing a ‘three strikes policy’ where disrupters are given three warnings to calm down before they are escorted out of the event with a trained marshal and/or campus security; meeting with university administrators, such as campus security, prior to the event to review security policy and give them a breakdown of how harassment will be managed; encouraging audience members themselves to not engage with Zionist threats and harassment; engaging in campus-wide education and outreach in the lead-up to IAW and other events so that the student body is well aware of the nature of the event, and able to distinguish anti-Apartheid activism from anti-Semitism; encouraging women and queer-identified activists to take on marshalling, chairing, and other positions of power to ensure that these roles are not always taken up by heterosexual, male identified folks (who often tend to occupy positions of power in organizing spaces, and which reflects dynamics in the world that privilege certain identities), while on the other hand, to ensure that all organizers are adequately trained to do some basic level of security/ ‘de-escalation’ work; as well as extensive media preparation, including interviews and submitting pre-event articles about speakers or events to campus newspapers in advance so as to engage in a ‘two-sided’ debate in media. These pro-active solutions by Palestine solidarity groups have, over the years, led

to the coordination of more successful events that are less disruptive and threatening for both audience members and organizers.

#### Identifying the right BDS target and setting clearly defined, and achievable goals

Student groups have noted the importance of targeting the university administration, including its Board of Governors, rather than pro-Israel student groups such as Hillel, faculty members and community members. As SAIA UofT notes, it is important to highlight the concrete links between the Canadian institutions and the maintenance of Israeli Apartheid. This helps to establish direct links between decisions made locally, and how this is brought to bear on a conflict that, for most students, likely seems a distant conflict unrelated to either themselves or the institutions which they are a part of. By highlighting these links through a divestment campaign, for example, student mobilization helps to bring the issue 'back home' and provides an opportunity for students to actively participate in a winnable social justice campaign. SAIA UofT also notes that in targeting the administration, it was able to pinpoint exactly how the university administrators were complicit in war crimes, apartheid, and colonialism. This not only helped gain supporters, but also made it possible to direct their energies to a concrete action (boycott and divestment). Similarly, SAIA Carleton representatives noted that their organizing was at its most successful when they directed their campaigns and struggle against the administration. Because it consistently presented itself as being 'neutral' on the so-called Israel-Palestine conflict, SAIA research was able to show the extent to which it wasn't. This made pro-Israel groups, and their arguments much less relevant, and BDS campaigning all the more effective.

#### Running campaigns that move beyond simple awareness raising.

While education and awareness building are important initial steps and must continue to take place throughout a BDS campaign, it is important to move beyond these, and set goals that target university administrations and hold them accountable for their complicity in sustaining Israeli Apartheid. In terms of a divestment campaign, for example, SAIA Carleton has found that there are two general streams that should be pursued simultaneously. The first is to undertake initiatives that are designed to achieve broad-based legitimacy for the campaign, so that the campus community is educated about and aware of Israeli apartheid in general, and the divestment campaign in particular. This includes launching the campaign with an event, complete with campaign information; petitions; group endorsements; outreach (tabling/flyering, class presentations, teach-ins, IAW and other regularly held events); and tackling student unions (education and outreach, meeting with executives/councillors). The second stream is to engage in activities that will create a mobilized student base that goes beyond your group, and that is ready to take concrete action for divestment when needed.

Given the extensive work that both streams involve, it is crucial for Palestine solidarity groups to map out what the work is likely to involve, and in doing so identifying concrete steps that need to be taken at each stage of the campaign. Short (current

academic year) and long (two or more academic years) timelines will be helpful for breaking down the work into its necessary phases.

#### Making sure your Palestine solidarity group is well structured

Student groups have noted the importance of having a structured organization within which to coordinate Palestine solidarity and BDS work. Organizers at Carleton, York, Trent and UofT offer the following recommendation for ensuring a structured organization:

- i) Having a clear mandate and basis of unity that outlines a political framework; orients group commitment to social justice broadly but foregrounds an anti-apartheid and pro-BDS analysis in all its work; and, one which outlines the parameters of the group's membership. This helps the group to stay on track by working within a coherent political analysis, creating a group identity, and retaining its autonomy.
- ii) Having a mentorship system that enables experienced members of the group to pair up with new members to do outreach, media, public speaking etc. It is also important to have regular internal education sessions.
- iii) Having a formal meeting structure and holding regular meetings with all group members. This is necessary to ensure that all important discussions are held, and decisions are made, at these meetings and not at informal discussions/meetings where the group members might not be able to participate. This will help to avoid problems of accountability, hierarchy, and splits in the group, with experienced members who have worked closely for a long time on one side and less experienced members who may not be as close to others in the group on the other.
- iv) Putting in place simple and concrete opportunities for new students to get involved in organizing. Some organizers noted, for example, that often the only opportunities in place for new students was to show up to future events or to become a core organizer; this lack of other options meant that many students were discouraged from joining the group. It is important to ensure that a wide variety of roles/tasks, requiring varying degrees of organizing experience, are made available to new students interested in joining the group.

#### Capacity building within the BDS movement

Student organizing brings with it a high turn-over rate of group members. Given the need to constantly rebuild student groups in light of this problem, student activists are increasingly channelling more time and effort into attracting and retaining members to maintain a healthy internal capacity. This entails mass outreach during frosh or alternative frosh weeks on campuses (for example, DisOrientation which is organized by various OPIRGs) and active engagement with all those interested at all events; constant education and training (media, police liaising, marshalling, design training of all

members); and/or the implementation of a buddy system to train the next generation of student activists by those who intend to leave the group. The strategy of building and maintaining internal capacity has been particularly important for ensuring that organizers remain focused on the broader goals and objectives of the movement, rather than simply organizing one-off events because they lack the capacity to engage in more systemic and sustained campaigns.

SAIA UofT and others, for example, highlight the importance of starting the academic year with a big public event, usually at the end of September, followed shortly thereafter by a new members meeting in October. This is key, they point out, to build momentum and get new incoming students plugged into the organizing scene early on in the academic term, when academic and extra-curricular loads are still light. New members meetings after other big events, such as IAW, are also helpful. This strategy works well to build momentum early in the year, and if continued every year, may help to build and strengthen internal capacity.

#### Documenting different forms and levels of harassments and repression, by university administration, students and government

Despite the pro-active measures undertaken by organizers, harassment of student activists and backlash against BDS related work will continue to be a feature of our organizing. Student activists have found it useful to document any, and all, types as well as levels, of repression for record keeping purposes. The logic is to highlight the level and nature of the harassment that Palestine solidarity activists face on a day-to-day basis. These include keeping a record of harassing emails; video-recording IAW and other events should false claims of harassment arise; and/or requesting documents and emails under the Freedom of Information Act by university administrators.

Documentation of threats and harassment has helped mediate the level of backlash and harassment on many campus cases, and allowed BDS activists to show, concretely, the different barriers they face when organizing on campus. When shared over social media and email list-serves, they are helpful in attracting third parties such as the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, pro-BDS faculty members and other social justice oriented who may be able to intervene and/or lend support.

#### Building diverse and wide-ranging alliances

The building of popular and successful divestment campaigns are the result of genuine cross-movement and cross-sector alliances that Palestine solidarity activists have been able to establish. In fact, this inter-cultural and cross-sectoral organizing – a crucial element of the BDS movement – is most evident in the student sector. Student organizers are often the first to link up with faculty members and/or labour activists, in part because these are the sectors that we are most often in closest contact with.

In concrete terms, this has involved student organizers reaching out to faculty members involved in Faculty for Palestine for support with room bookings for IAW or other events; close communication with respected and progressive members of the community who can speak to campus repression and mobilize quickly should it happen; encouraging allied students to run on politically progressive slates of student unions; finding existing progressive executives or other students holding positions of power to collaborate on pushing forward divestment campaigns (i.e. those on responsible investment committees). SAIA Carleton, for example, notes how supportive Faculty for Palestine (F4P) members were throughout all of their campaigns. While there were typically 4 – 5 professors in particular that were heavily involved, at least a couple of dozen others would encourage SAIA members to make announcements about their various campaigns in their classes, and would make themselves available to sign letters, or donate funds. SAIA York's experience with faculty members was also very positive in the development of their joint divestment campaign with SAIA UofT. They noted for example, that having the input of the faculty members – with respect to research and in weekly strategy meetings – was essential in moving the process along.

Beyond faculty members, student groups all noted the importance of reaching out to other progressive on-campus groups as well as local artists and performers. SAIA Carleton for example, made a conscious effort to work closely with the Carleton Anti-Apartheid Action Group, the group that mobilized to get Carleton to divest from South African Apartheid, as well as Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) and the Association of Palestinian Arab Canadians (APAC). Further to the south, the UC Santa Cruz Committee for Justice in Palestine noted that their divestment bill passed earlier this year in no small part due to efforts of other student organizations (the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, Autonomous Students, African/Black Student Alliance, African Student Union, and Muslim Students Association) and individuals who came out to support the divestment bill as it was presented to and voted on by the student union. And, SAIA Regina sought out local artists and well-known speakers who happened to be travelling to the university to speak in favour of, and lend support, to their BDS work.

Building support has also meant broadening the themes of IAW events to include those related to and in solidarity with other struggles. In Toronto, this has ranged from events featuring Indigenous struggles in Canada to the revolution and civil war in Syria. The broadening of IAW themes to ostensibly 'non-Palestine' issues, while a tricky thing to manage if we wish to keep 'Palestine' at the centre of IAW, is very useful because it means that a more diverse range of organizations not only formally endorse BDS events, but actually participate in it. As such, Palestine solidarity work on campuses tends to attract activists from different cultural and equity seeking groups, all of whom are bound to BDS work for its emphasis on anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-capitalist politics. Similarly, recent years has also seen a significant increase in the number of Jewish organizers and groups in the solidarity movement. A significant change in this regard for example, has been the Open Hillel movement in the United States. In the Canadian context, anti-Zionist Jewish groups such as Independent Jewish Voices (IJV),

Not In Our Name (NION), and the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN) are often the first groups to endorse BDS events on campuses and/or provide support when campus groups face repression.

The inclusion of different equity seeking groups and social sectors has been crucial in showing the universal and humanitarian nature of Palestine solidarity and BDS organizing – one that defies mainstream expectations of activists being Palestinian (or at the very least, Middle Eastern) background, or politically ‘ultra-left.’

#### Diversity of tactics to raise awareness and build the BDS campaign

Palestine solidarity groups all use a diversity of tactics to engage their student body in BDS work. The groups interviewed for this booklet noted that they put up informational and ‘catchy’ posters around the campus; used art, music, and dance-based outreach; organized panel discussions; engaged in online outreach through functional websites, various social media platforms, and email list-serves; coordinated direct actions and disruptions such as sit-ins and rallies; held press conferences and conducted media interviews; did access to information requests; and reported their universities to the Human Rights Tribunal (SAIA Carleton) and Canadian Civil Liberties Association (SAIA York). They noted that it is this diversity of tactics that keeps the organizing and mobilizing dynamic and fresh, and the administration guessing on how to respond, rather than the other way around.

That said, student groups such as SAIA Carleton, SAIA UofT, SAIA Regina, among others have found in-person outreach sessions – whether through setting up informational tables and engaging students directly, or distributing flyers and other information in busy areas of the campus – most useful because they present opportunities to engage real, live people from their campus. In these cases, it is often useful to have prepared FAQ sheets and hold training sessions, especially for new members to review and attend, before they engage in in-person outreach activities. This will ensure that they (and all members) are prepared to deal with the more ‘difficult’ questions, know how to avoid engaging in unnecessary back and forth discussion with Zionist students and faculty, and instead, focus on engaging students who genuinely want to find out more about Palestine solidarity and BDS.

## SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR PALESTINE SOLIDARITY ORGANIZING

Are you, or your organization, looking to get involved in Palestine solidarity and/or contributing to pro-BDS work on your campus? Do you wish to access or develop resources, exchange ideas and strategies, or coordinate educational events on your campus? There are a number of resources that are available to you. Below, you will find a brief list of some widely-used reading materials, documentaries, and websites of organizations that you may find useful throughout your organizing experience.

### Recommended reading materials

#### *Books & Articles:*

Bakan, A.B. & Abu-Laban, Y. "Palestinian resistance and international solidarity: The BDS campaign." Race and Class 51(1): 2009, 29-54.

Barghouti, Omar. *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions – The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights*. Haymarket, 2011.

Davis, Uri. *Apartheid Israel: Possibilities for the Struggle Within*. New York: Zed Books, 2003.

Lim, Audrea. *The Case for Sanctions Against Israel*. New York: Verso, 2012.

Pappe, Ilan. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.

Said, Edward. *The Question of Palestine*. New York: Vintage, 1979.

The Students Against Israeli Apartheid – Carleton University. *A Guide to University Campus Divestment*. Ottawa, 2010.

The Students Against Israeli Apartheid – University of Toronto and the University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union (UTGSU) BDS Ad Hoc Committee. *The Case for Divestment from Companies Benefitting from Violations of International Law and Human Rights Abuses in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*. Toronto, 2014.

The Students Against Israeli Apartheid – York University. *Holding York University Accountable: Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*. Toronto, 2011.

Tilley, Virginia. *The One State Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

*Booklets and Factsheets:*

It Is Apartheid Factsheets: <http://www.itisapartheid.org/facts.html>

Stop the Wall Factsheets: <http://www.stopthewall.org/resources/factsheets>

US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation – Divestment Handbook:  
<http://www.endtheoccupation.org/downloads/divestguide.pdf>

**Recommended documentaries**

*Occupation 101: Voices of the Silenced Majority.* Dir. Sufyan Omeish and Abdallah Omeish, 2006.

*Roadmap to Apartheid.* Dir. Ana Nogueira and Eron Davidson, 2012.

*Route 181- Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel.* Dir. Eyal Sivan and Michel Khleifi, 2003.

*The Land Speaks Arabic.* Dir. Maryse Gargour, 2008.

**Organizational websites**

Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), a wide coalition of the largest Palestinian organizations, trade unions, networks and NGOs: <http://www.bdsmovement.net>

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI):  
<http://www.pacbi.org>

The Electronic Intifada, useful media outlet for BDS related news and analysis:  
<http://electronicintifada.net>

Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW), official website for global IAW events:  
<http://apartheidweek.org>

Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA), a network of pro-BDS activists and organizations based in Canada: <http://www.caiaweb.org>

Ontario Public Interest Research Groups (OPIRGs), progressive, social justice-oriented student organizations in Ontario: <http://www.opirg.org>

