

A minute on the boycott of goods from the occupied Palestinian territories made by Meeting for Sufferings on 2 April 2011

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.