



# European Trade Union **INITIATIVE** For Justice In Palestine

**European Trade Union Seminar : Solidarity with Palestine**  
**Ending European complicity with Israeli violations of international law**  
**Brussels, 18-19 November 2016**

In November 2016 over 100 trade union delegates, representing twenty nine unions and three million members from all over Europe, gathered in a historic first meeting in Brussels to challenge the EU and European governments' complicity with Israel and establish a cross European platform in solidarity with the people of Palestine.



**Initial endorsers of the initiative** : The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), Fagforbundet (Norway), Union syndicale Solidaires (France), La Centrale Générale-FGTB (Belgium), ACV/CSC Brussels (Belgium), UNISON (UK), The Norwegian Trade Union LO in Trondheim, Unison N. Ireland, Derry Trades Union Council, Belfast & District Trades Union Council, Workmates - trade union section of Norwegian, Palestine Committee (Norway), Trade Union Friends of Palestine (Ireland), Communications Workers Union (Ireland), Confederacion Intersindical Galega (Spain), Mandate Trade Union (Ireland), ELA – Basque Workers Solidarity, IRW-CGSP (Belgium), LBC-NVK (Belgium), Palestinawerkgroep-FNV (The Netherlands), CNE (Belgium), IAC (Spain), Civil Public and Services Union - CPSU (Ireland), Intersindical Valenciana, Irish National Teachers' Organisation - Branches: Derry City, Newry, Dungannon, Armagh, Belfast West, The Palestine Committee of Norway - Union section (Union of railway workers), IMPACT (Ireland), CGT France – 66, The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance.

## TWO DAY SEMINAR

**During the two day-seminar** opened by a representative of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions we heard from a wide range of European trade union representatives about the urgent need to challenge and bring about an end to European complicity with Israeli human rights violations. The seminar was also addressed by Palestinian trade union leaders about their struggle for justice and equality. Representatives from PGFTU, GFIU, the Arab Workers Union, the New Unions and Communication Workers Union were all active participants in the discussions.

**The seminar was also addressed by Palestinian trade union leaders** by expert speakers on the political economy of the occupation, and on the multiple ways in which the Israeli state benefits from EU financial and political support. During the two-day seminar we looked at concrete steps to strengthen ties between the European and Palestinian trade union movement; discussed and shared ways in which trade unions are effectively campaigning to pressure the European Union, governments, institutions and businesses to end their support for Israeli violations of workers' rights, human rights and international law and explored possibilities for coordination and joint work between trade unions and trade union activists across Europe.

**During two-day seminar trade union delegates from nine European countries** took part in 5 thematic workshops and 3 plenary sessions. The group at each workshop came out with a number of action points to be implemented in campaigns organised by trade unions in their respective countries. The delegates also brought this new trade union initiative into the streets of Brussels by holding a protest rally displaying the campaign banner.





# WORKSHOPS – SOLIDARITY THROUGH CAMPAIGNING

## I. European Union complicity

During this workshop we heard that the EU is Israel's largest export market, and Israel's second largest source of imports. This is made possible by the EU-Israel Association Agreement, signed in 1995 in the wake of the Oslo agreements and entered into force in June 2000. The agreement however is dependent on adherence to the human rights clause, in Article 2 which states that "*Relations between the Parties, as well as all the provisions of the Agreement itself, shall be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this Agreement*".

**The European Parliament** voted in 2002 to suspend the agreement due to Israel's gross violations of human rights. It should be noted however that this vote took place when there were only 15 member states in the EU, before the Eastern European states also became members.



### Some small victories:

**The EU formal position on the settlements** has always been one of opposition, due to the clear breach of international law. Yet even though it condemns the settlements, it continues to support Israeli public institutions based in occupied Palestinian Territory. However public pressure is beginning to have an impact. In June 2013 the EU refused to recognise the authority of Israel to certificate organic products from the OPT. Guidelines were also



produced in 2013, prior to the signing of the Horizon 2020 agreement, which stated that entities based in the settlements can't apply for EU funds. However entities based in Israel, that operate and have projects based in the settlements, and even public institutions headquartered in settlements in the OPT, can still apply for funding and participate in Horizon 2020 for a project that do not take place in the OPT.

**In addition 19 European countries** issued guidelines to businesses, cautioning of the additional risks associated with dealing with the settlements. In 2015 the EU issued guidelines on the labelling of settlement products. This however is not obligatory for manufactured products unless they specify their origins. It was agreed that EU action to date has been largely symbolic and ineffective in curtailing Israeli abuses - that there is an urgent imperative now for the European trade union movement to take action to bring an end to on-going EU complicity.

**A number of proposals** were put forward and discussed that included :

- To demand for a ban of settlement products;
- 1 To ensure that unions adopt policies calling for an end to EU complicity;
- 1 To improve ties with the Eastern European trade unions to strengthen Palestine solidarity and pressure on governments there;
- 1 To influence ETUC to ensure that it takes more effective and appropriate action on Israel;
- 1 To ensure that public procurement at national and local authorities level is based on human rights

considerations and complies with UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the related EU Directive

## II. Corporate complicity

**European private businesses companies**, as well as international companies operating in Europe, contribute to human rights abuses associated with illegal Israeli settlements including by providing equipment used in house demolitions and by participating in the construction and operation of infrastructure for illegal Israeli settlements.

The workshop addressed the most potent examples of corporate complicity with Israel's violations of Palestinian rights and the role the European trade union movement can play in holding these corporations accountable. We have looked and examined historical examples, like actions against G4S, which to a large extent have left the Israeli market and assessed new targets (e.g Hewlett Packard).



**Unions like Fagforbundet and Unison** have already taken the decision not to renew contracts with HP. Other unions have agreed or are discussing similar policies. It was highlighted that public sector unions can play a major role in influencing public sector procurement of IT products and services..

**Additional points raised by trade unions delegates included :**

- Developing a motion for unions to not procure from companies violating international law and Palestinian rights with a focus on HP ;
- Producing an info pack/presentation on HP and its impact on Palestinian workers as a way of building

support for the campaign within the trade union movement ;

- Setting up particular mechanisms to share best experiences ;
- Sharing information about the extent of corporate complicity, specifically in certain sectors like oil in Norway, banks in France etc.
- Work in the trade unions to make known the stakes of the presence of European companies' complicity, specifically in certain sectors like oil in Norway, banks in France, etc.



## III. European complicity with Israel's military industrial complex

During this workshop we looked at links between European and Israeli military and security sectors, assessing their impact on the Palestinian people and European domestic policies. We addressed the question on how can trade unions and social justice movements unite in the struggle for a military embargo against Israel.

**A number of proposals** were put forward and discussed :

- To initiate an educational campaign on EU-Israel Association Agreement and their military ties with some short video and fact sheet summarising main points ;
- To update the Horizon2020 projects database and share with affiliated trade unions with the focus of launching specific campaigns ;
- To link military industry and the Israeli state's practices to lived realities of Palestinian workers as a way of building arguments for military embargo ;

- To put trade unions logos to produced materials in order to normalise the argument for military embargo.

## IV. Building ties of trade union solidarity

**This workshop heard from European trade unions** with direct solidarity ties with Palestinian trade unions. Representatives of Unison (UK), La Centrale Générale-FGTB (Belgium), Solidaires (France), Fagforbundet (Norway), ICTU (Ireland) and FSU (France) took part in an active discussion about organising trade union delegations to Palestine. Participants underlined the importance of regular delegations with concrete outcomes (like pictures, reports, videos) as well as circulating the message of solidarity after coming back home. One of the most interesting examples was presented by our Norwegian colleagues from Fagforbundet, where they developed a concept of “Palestinian Ambassadors” - 25 people throughout the country. A similar model was adopted by Belgian union La Centrale Générale-FGTB. Different examples of cooperation between European and Palestinian trade unions were mentioned like organising specific joint projects.

### **Additional points were raised and discussed by trade union delegates :**

- The importance of organising meetings with local, grassroots actors and the focus of role of women in society and in trade unions in particular;
- Circulating invitations when Palestinian trade unionists come to Europe in order to arrange meetings in different European countries;
- To work on excluding Histadrut from the international trade union movement.

## V. Building an effective network of European trade unions in solidarity with the Palestinian people

Participants agreed that the formation of this network is a major breakthrough for solidarity work within the European trade union movement,

which has been consistent in its call for a just solution for the Palestinian people.

During this workshop we discussed the mechanisms of setting up a European Trade Union Network for Justice in Palestine and its priorities.

First steps proposed by trade union delegates include having a mailing list, expanding the steering committee group, launching a website and conducting joint meetings at least twice a year. Expanding and establishing the steering committee group is an open process. The group consists of delegates mandated by their trade unions. If your union is not already represented in the Initiative's steering committee group we invite you to chose your delegate and contact us at :

[etu.palestine@gmail.com](mailto:etu.palestine@gmail.com)

### **A number of other proposals were put forward and discussed:**

- A need to involve larger number of European trade unions in order to build a broad platform and expand coordination committee;
- To pressure ETUC to speak out against European complicity with Israel's violations of international law and human rights;
- To share information and materials to help coordinate Europe-wide trade union campaigns' campaigns;
- To communicate research on EU-Israel relations;
- To have unions affiliated to the network to influence their own governments to take action;
- Establish links and exchange information with Palestinian unions;
- Publish articles from the network, and Palestinian unions, in our journals;
- Steering committee to organise a follow-up conference to review progres.





# FINAL PLENARY

At the closing plenary delegates came together to hear a summary of the workshops and recommended actions. During the feed-back, and the final presentations from the European and Palestinian trade union delegates, there was a determined call to continue with this initiative and to build the European trade union network. Delegates committed themselves to go back to their unions to ensure they take concrete action to highlight and to challenge European complicity.

Delegates finally agreed to reconvene again, at the next conference, to review progress and continue to build the campaign.

At the conference in Brussels, an appeal was issued to more trade unions to get involved – if your union is interested in affiliating to the campaign please contact the organizers at :

[etu.palestine@gmail.com](mailto:etu.palestine@gmail.com)

## APPENDIX : INVITATION TO ENDORSE TRADE UNIONS INITIATIVE FOR PALESTINE

**The trade union movement**, acting in the spirit of international working class solidarity, and in defence of fundamental human rights, has consistently called for a just solution for the Palestinian people. The fundamental values of trade union internationalism mandates us to take concrete and effective action towards an end to Israel's illegal occupation, the implementation of UN resolutions, and a just and equitable settlement for all.

It is in this spirit that we send out this call for a coordinated mobilisation of the European trade union movement to take effective action to bring an end to Israel's denial of Palestinian rights and grave violations of international law..

### CALL TO ENDORSE THE INITIATIVE

**The question of Palestine is at a crucial moment.** Israel is relentlessly advancing the colonization of Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem and continues to actively expel Palestinians from their ancestral land. A brutal siege has been imposed on the 1.8 million residents of the Gaza strip since 2007 and Palestinian refugees are still denied their right to return.

**Despite various peace and economic development initiatives**, the persistence of Israel's violent occu-

pying system renders the development of the Palestinian economy practically impossible. Unemployment rate in the occupied West Bank rests at 27 percent, while a 2015 World Bank report indicated that Gaza has the highest level of unemployment rate in the world.



**The oppressive system of the internationally deemed illegal wall, settlements**, checkpoints and further land annexation imposed upon the Palestinian population not only denies Palestinians the ability to develop a prosperous local economy, expels them from their land and source of income, but it also forces workers into humiliating and exploitative conditions of work in order to survive.

**Numerous UN resolutions and European Union recommendations** have not ended Israel's blatant viola-

tion of international law. Israel continues with its colonial expansion and brutal policy of discrimination against the Palestinian people, including the 1.5 million Palestinian citizens of Israel.

**As European trade unionists** we are alarmed that despite the clear injustice inflicted on the people of Palestine, European states, the European Union (EU) and representative institutions have failed to fulfil their duty to hold Israel accountable for its grave violations of international law. Within this regime of impunity, multinational corporations reap profits by facilitating the continued oppression and dispossession of the Palestinian people.

**While the EU criticizes some aspects of Israel's policies**, they continue to provide it with political, economic and military support. The EU Free Trade consistently trumps Palestinian rights, as highlighted by more than 150 European civil society organisations, showing how the TTIP will curtail possibilities for Palestine campaigning.

**We are particularly interested in developing an effective campaign** to end the EU-Israel Association Agreement. The Agreement grants Israel preferential access to European markets, allows Israeli ministries and weapons companies to receive EU

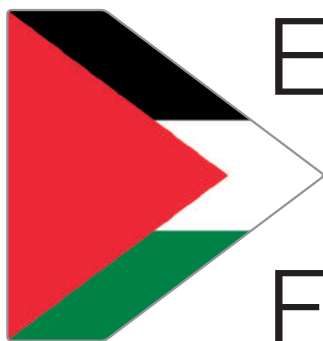
funding and provides Israel with the political support it needs to carry out its crimes against the Palestinian people.

**This comes in violation of Article 2 of the Agreement** which states that: “*Relations between the Parties... shall be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles..*” The continued application of the EU-Israel Association Agreement despite Israel’s clear violation of the Article 2 clause fosters an environment of impunity and tolerance towards Israel's crimes. We believe that as trade unionists and conscious citizens of this world, we have duty and power to act. We believe it is time for us to collectively stand in solidarity with the Palestinian labour movement, to develop strategies for holding our governments and the EU as a representative body accountable, and put pressure on corporations to end their complicity with Israel's violations of international law and human rights. We invite your trade union organisation to join the European Trade Union Network for Justice in Palestine, and endorse the establishment of a cross European platform of trade unions and trade unionists working to strengthen trade union solidarity with Palestine and bringing an end to European complicity with Israeli violations of international law and human rights.



You can write to : [etu.palestine@gmail.com](mailto:etu.palestine@gmail.com)

Or get link with of our members...



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