

Five countries boycott tourism conference in Jerusalem

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The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) is a wide coalition of the largest Palestinian mass organizations, trade unions, networks and organizations.

Member organizations:

Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine
Gen. Union of Palestinian Workers
Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions
Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)
Palestinian Nat'l Institute for NGOs
Federation of Indep. Trade Unions
Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition
Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Initiative
Gen. Union of Palestinian Women
Union of Palestinian Farmers
Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (STW)
Nat'l Committee for Grassroots Resistance
Pal. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)
Nat'l Committee to Commemorate the Nakba
Civic Coalition for the Defense of Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem
Coalition for Jerusalem
Union of Pal. Charitable Organizations
Palestinian Economic Monitor
Union of Youth Activity Centers- Palestine Refugee Camps
Union of Professional Associations

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- UK, Sweden, Turkey, South Africa, and Ireland will not attend controversial conference hosted by Israel
- Many countries undecided or set to only send low-level delegations
- OECD General Secretary warns Netanyahu over Israeli Tourism Minister comments
- Palestine Legislative Council appeals for more countries to boycott conference
- Israeli membership of OECD 'illegal under international law'

Occupied Palestine – An OECD 'High Level Roundtable' on tourism due to take place in West Jerusalem has been thrown into chaos by the decision of five countries not to attend and the disclosure by several others that only low-level delegations will take part.

Following attempts by Israel to use the conference to further its territorial claims on Jerusalem and concerns raised by Palestinian civil society and its international supporters that the conference serves to whitewash Israeli violations of international law, the UK, Sweden, Ireland, Turkey and South Africa¹ announced that they would not be taking part. Although the UK denied that its refusal to attend was politically motivated², Sweden and Turkey openly stated that their withdrawals are political in nature.³

In a further blow to the credibility of the 'high level' conference at which 'senior government officials' were expected to discuss tourism policy⁴, a number of countries will not send tourism ministers and instead low-ranking officials will represent member country governments. The Greek delegation to the OECD told campaigners during telephone calls that no officials from Athens will make the trip and instead a staff member from the Greek tourist information centre in Tel-Aviv will represent Greece. During other telephone calls to OECD offices, campaigners learnt that Denmark will only send a statistician and that Belgium and Norway are still considering what level of representation will attend. France will be represented at a "technical level" only.⁵ A number of countries are yet to decide whether Ministers should attend, campaigners understand.

The withdrawals come following comments made by Israeli tourism minister Stas Misezhnikov that the situating of the meeting in Jerusalem – the first OECD meeting hosted by Israel since it became a member in May and only the second time an OECD tourism conference has been held outside of Paris - was in effect recognition by OECD members of Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital.⁶ In a strongly worded letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, OECD General Secretary Angel Gurría called the comments "factually incorrect and quite unacceptable".⁷

Palestinian opposition to the tourism conference being held in Jerusalem has been consistent. In a letter to Mr Gurría last month, the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC), a broad

Palestinian civil society coalition, called upon the OECD to move the conference. “Organizing this tourism conference in Israel sends once again a strong signal that OECD members are perfectly willing to be complicit with Israel’s oppression of Palestinians and actively support Israel’s PR efforts to whitewash its colonial and apartheid policies,” the letter said.⁸ The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) both issued statements thanking UK and Turkey for boycotting the conference and calling on other countries follow suit.⁹

“We warmly salute all of the countries who have decided not to attend this conference. We urge OECD member states to make a principled stand for justice, international law and human rights by refraining from attending the OECD Tourism Conference to be held in Jerusalem. We are also asking citizens of OECD member countries to put pressure on their governments not to attend” said Hind Awwad, coordinator with the Palestinian Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC), a broad Palestinian civil society coalition.

“Israel is using its membership of the OECD to whitewash its violations of international law and further its processes of occupation, colonization and apartheid, just as Palestinian civil warned it would. Attending the conference can only be seen as a seal of approval for Israel’s ongoing ethnic cleansing policies in Jerusalem” she added.

Spain had originally been declared as boycotting the conference, but it has since emerged that a low-level delegation will attend.

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Notes to editors

1. The decision by the Irish government not to attend the conference was announced to campaigners by email late last night. The decisions of Turkey, South Africa, Sweden and the UK have been publicly reported.
2. The 86th Session of the OECD Tourism Committee is due to take place in Jerusalem 20-22 October
3. Israel was admitted to the OECD in May 2010 despite a global campaign against the move as likely to have the impact of emboldening Israeli impunity. Campaigners believe that Israel does not meet the required economic and human rights standards of OECD membership and that OECD members who allowed Israeli to join the OECD did so in violation of their own commitments to the IV Geneva Conventions.¹⁰ Israeli economic data submitted to the OECD includes information relating to illegal Israeli settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territory, a move campaigners say is equivalent to OECD endorsement of the Israeli occupation.¹¹
4. Details of email and telephone conversations relating to various countries’ positions are available on request.

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¹ <http://groups.google.com/group/cosatu-press/msg/c83fdea6022751b7?pli=1>

² <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/tourism-minister-u-k-spain-to-boycott-oecd-tourism-conference-because-it-s-in-jerusalem-1.317212>

³ <http://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/sverige-nobbar-turismkonferens-i-israel-1.1187844>

⁴ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-expands-israel-veto-to-multilateral-platforms-2010-10-12>

⁵ <http://www.86tourismsessionisrael.org/about86.asp>

⁶ http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2010/10/09/conference-sur-le-tourisme-a-jerusalem-l-ocde-reprimande-israel_1422802_3218.html

⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11508953>

⁸ <http://notoisraelnormalization.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/ag-2010-541-ilt-netanyahu.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/773>

⁹ <http://notoisraelnormalization.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/prees.jpg> <http://notoisraelnormalization.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/plc-statement-to-oecd-secretary-general-14-10-2010.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://notoisraelnormalization.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/oecd-gglegal-opinion.pdf> and

<http://notoisraelnormalization.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/oecdlegalmemo.pdf>

¹¹ <http://notoisraelnormalization.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/oecdbriefingaic.pdf>