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**TUC Congress policy on the Middle East  
2009 - 2011**

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### **TUC General Council Statement on the Middle East, 17 September 2009**

The TUC reiterates its belief that only when a sovereign, independent, democratic contiguous and viable Palestinian state is created, living side by side with a secure Israel will there be a chance for peace and stability in the Middle East. We remain committed to a two-state solution to the crisis in the Middle East and support for the Road Map. We recognize the enormous suffering of the Palestinian people, and we call upon the British Government to make appropriate representations to the international community to secure lasting peace through a negotiated settlement based on mutual respect and self-determination, on justice for the Palestinians and on security for Israel.

The TUC reiterates its condemnation of the Government of Israel's offensive in Gaza which resulted in 1,450 Palestinian deaths and 5,000 injured, as well as the massive, systematic destruction of infrastructure. We also reiterate our condemnation of the rocket attacks from inside Gaza against Israeli civilians. We welcome the findings of the UN investigation which highlighted possible war crimes on both sides of the conflict. The TUC remains concerned about the situation in Gaza and reiterates its opposition to the Israeli blockade, which is in contravention of international law and prevents vital supplies from reaching the people of Gaza. We welcome the contributions unions made earlier this year to the TUC Aid appeal for Gaza.

As a result of the Gaza offensive, the TUC calls on the British Government to:

- (a) condemn the Israeli military aggression and the continuing blockade of Gaza;
- (b) end arms sales to Israel which reached a value of £18.8 million in 2008, up from £7.7 million in 2007;
- (c) seek EU agreement to impose a ban on the importing of goods produced in the illegal settlements; and
- (d) support moves to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement which provides preferential trade facilities to Israel.

The TUC reiterates our pledge to work in solidarity with the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) and urges unions to support financially the TUC/PGFTU projects funded through TUC Aid as well as the joint Histadrut-PGFTU projects being developed in several sectors under the auspices of Global Union Federations. We welcome the resolution last year of the longstanding dispute over the remittance of membership subscriptions from the Histadrut to the PGFTU, which was brokered by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and support any stronger relations between the Histadrut and the PGFTU that they wish to develop.

The TUC condemns the Histadrut statement of 13 January 2009 which backed the attacks on Gaza and showed insufficient concern for the level of civilian casualties. At the same time, we recognize the recent Histadrut resolution on peace and co-operation, welcomed by the ITUC, which calls on the Israeli government to make concessions and take courageous and concrete steps towards attaining peace.

We will continue to press Histadrut to take a firmer line on these issues. The General Council will raise Congress' concerns with the Histadrut and report back to Congress on future relationships.

To increase the pressure for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territories, and the removal of the separation wall and the illegal settlements, we will support a boycott (where trade union members should not put their own jobs at risk by refusing to deal with such products) of those goods and agricultural products that originate in illegal settlements - through developing an effective, targeted consumer-led boycott campaign working closely with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign - and campaign for disinvestment by companies associated with the occupation as well as engaged in building the separation wall. In undertaking these actions each affiliate will operate within its own aims and objectives and within the law.

We reiterate our encouragement to unions to affiliate to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and to raise greater awareness of the issues.

(Please note: this General Council statement takes precedence over motion 76 Palestine from TUC Congress 2009)

### **Introductory speech by TUC General Secretary moving General Council statement on the Middle East**

Thanks Sheila.

Congress, the Middle East is perhaps the most intractable dispute in the world.

The General Council has worked hard to come up with a statement which the Congress can unite around. That has involved compromise on all sides, and I am grateful to all the colleagues who have contributed.

What you have before you sets out principles we can all share, conclusions I hope we can all agree on and actions we can all take.

I don't want to take you through the whole statement, but I want to highlight some of the key points.

First, the General Council thought that it was important to set out up front our vision of the future for the Middle East that we want to reach.

A two-state solution. The Road Map. Justice for the Palestinians. Security for Israel.

The international community - including our own government but also, critically, the US Presidency - has a key role.

Earlier this year, the TUC condemned the Israeli offensive in Gaza. And we reiterate that condemnation in the statement today. It led to many, many deaths and intolerable suffering.

The rocket attacks on Israeli citizens have also been condemned.

Both were unacceptable, and both have led to the UN investigation concluding that war crimes may have been committed.

The blockade of Gaza, which continues to this day, is intolerable collective punishment.

Turning to the unions in the region, we have for the last year been trying to persuade the Histadrut - the Israeli TUC - to be more vocal in criticising the Israeli Government.

We think that the statement issued by the Histadrut in January, which failed to recognize the appalling loss of life and the suffering caused by the Gaza offensive, should be condemned.

We will continue to press them over the crucial issues of the occupation, the separation wall, the roadblocks, and the illegal settlements.

But both Histadrut and the PGFTU know that there is no prospect for peace for working people in the region if the union movements do not work together, and the General Council remains committed to helping them to do that.

Through our longstanding relationship with both Histadrut and the PGFTU we have actively encouraged joint working and the agreement reached a year ago on the remittance of membership subscription income from Histadrut to the PGFTU.

Finally, the General Council has considered what can be done by us to apply pressure to the Israeli government to make the end of the occupation, the dismantling of the separation wall, and the removal of the illegal settlements more likely.

We believe that targeted action - aimed at goods from the illegal settlements and at companies involved in the occupation and the wall - is the right way forward.

This is not a call for a general boycott of Israeli goods and services which would hit ordinary Palestinian and Israeli workers, but targeted, consumer-led sanctions directed at businesses based in, and sustaining, the illegal settlements.

Congress, the situation in the Middle East is grim. Our brothers and sisters every day face terrible terrible problems. They need all our support in creating a just and lasting peace.

President Obama is now trying to move things forward, and we all wish him every success.

But we, too, have a part to play, and the General Council statement sets it out.

I commend it to Congress.

## **TUC Congress 2010, Composite motion 18 – Palestine**

Congress condemns the Israeli blockades of the Palestinian territories, particularly the Gaza strip where there is a severe and ongoing deterioration in the living conditions of those living there.

The actions of the Israeli military, under the orders of their Government, in mounting a deadly assault on activists on the Mavi Marmara and other ships seeking to take humanitarian aid to Gaza is particularly condemned.

Congress furthermore condemns the Histadrut statement of 31 May which sought to justify the Israeli action and the failure of the Histadrut to condemn settlement construction. Congress endorses the 3 June 2010 statement of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions, criticising the Histadrut and calling for an immediate end to the military blockade on Gaza and for a full independent inquiry into the attack on the Mavi Marmara.

Congress believes that the effective annexation of massive swathes of land by Israel in defiance of international law, using walls and checkpoints and destroying Palestinian homes in the process, is a deliberate strategy to undermine the viability of the West Bank and thereby the potential for an independent Palestinian state.

Congress calls on the UK Government and the EU to take much stronger political steps to ensure Israel abides by UN resolutions.

Congress instructs the General Council to work closely with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign to actively encourage affiliates, employers and pension funds to disinvest from, and boycott the goods of, companies who profit from illegal settlements, the Occupation and the construction of the Wall.

Congress instructs the General Council to bring to Congress a report on the impact of the boycott and investment withdrawal strategy, together with the outcome of the PGFTU/Histadrut discussions recently facilitated by the ITUC and TUC. Congress agrees to join unions around the world for maximum coordination internationally for active solidarity to end the siege of Gaza and for a free Palestine.

## **General Council attitude on Palestine**

The General Council recognises the real and justified outrage of many British trade unionists about the actions of the Israeli Government and the suffering of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. As well as the blockade of Gaza outlined in the composite, which must be ended, the deadly assault on the Mavi Marmara, the wall, the continuing construction of settlements and the treatment of Palestinian workers in those settlements constitute flagrant obstacles to the peace process – as does the increasing encroachment on East Jerusalem. These and other outrages have led many trade unionists to call for a wider boycott, divestment and sanctions

strategy than the strategy of boycotting illegal settlements agreed by Congress in 2009, to demonstrate to the Israeli Government our abhorrence at their actions.

Given the current direct negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel; the ITUC's work programme (joint Histadrut/PGFTU involvement in the ILO's project to promote the rights of Palestinian workers in the settlements, the joint commitment of the PGFTU and Histadrut to the development of a joint political statement on how to deal with the obstacles to the peace process, and a high-level trade union delegation to the Middle East); and in particular the planned PGFTU Congress in May 2011, the General Council believes that, at this crucial moment for the peace process, we should actively strengthen the implementation of the existing policy by divesting from and boycotting the goods of companies who profit from the illegal settlements, the Occupation and the construction of the wall, including by putting the burden of proof on companies to demonstrate the integrity of their supply chains, while continuing to demand that the Government and EU prohibit the import of such goods. We will review the success of this campaign and developments in the peace process at Congress in 2011, so that if further action is considered necessary, it can be agreed at that point. The General Council will agree a concrete programme for developing this boycott campaign at its meeting in October.

## **TUC Congress 2011, Motion 71 – Peace in the Middle East/South Asia**

Congress notes that the “war on terror” is still continuing and has failed, after ten years, to bring the promised peace and stability to either the Middle East or the wider world.

Congress believes it is time Britain disengaged from this conflict and in particular urges the rapid withdrawal of British forces from Afghanistan. The occupation there has brought devastation to the country, cost the lives of thousands of civilians and hundreds of British soldiers and destabilised nuclear-armed Pakistan. The future of Afghanistan can only be determined through talks between the parties in the country itself.

Congress believes the attack against Libya has been misjudged and, while holding no brief for the Gadaffi regime, believes military action should be halted immediately and that international efforts should be focused on securing a peaceful political settlement to the conflict.

Since there can be no peace in the region without justice for the Palestinians, Congress endorses the call for the recognition of the State of Palestine and urges the British government to take all actions appropriate to help achieve this objective. Congress calls for immediate, unconditional negotiations between the Israeli government and the representatives of the Palestinian people to secure peace.

Congress reaffirms policy adopted in 2010, particularly the instruction to the General Council “to work closely with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign to actively encourage affiliates, employers and pension funds to disinvest from, and boycott the goods of, companies who profit from illegal settlements, the Occupation and the construction of the Wall.

Congress deplores the anti-democratic law passed by the Knesset banning individuals and organisations in Israel from calling for the boycott of Israel.

Congress calls on all unions on the basis of this policy to review their bilateral relations with all Israeli organisations, including Histadrut.