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This ruling allows councils to boycott Israel. It's a crucial victory | Ben Jamal

Ben Jamal Monday 26 June 2017 21.29 AEST

Two weeks ago I found myself in a sweaty room in the Royal Courts of Justice, packed with fellow Palestine activists, listening to detailed and sometimes arcane legal arguments about pension law. The journey that ended in that courtroom began in September last year when the government announced new guidance intended to prohibit local government pension schemes from pursuing “divestment and sanctions against foreign nations and UK defence industries ... other than where formal legal sanctions, embargoes and restrictions have been put in place by the government”.

The key target of these new rules was made clear in the [government press release](#) about the decision. This was the government acting to place a ban on boycotting Israel. The regulations were introduced in November 2016 despite a [public consultation](#) indicating that 98% of respondents thought this was the wrong thing to do, and [a wider public outcry](#). The Palestine Solidarity Campaign, of which I'm the director, decided to take the government on. We launched a judicial review supported with witness statements from War on Want, Campaign Against the Arms Trade and the Quakers. Finally, [on 22 June, we got the verdict – we won!](#) Judge Sir Ross Cranston ruled the guidance was unlawful and that the government had acted for an improper purpose.

This is a victory for the rule of law, for local democracy and for freedom of expression. But it is also a crucial moment in the [campaign for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions \(BDS\) against Israel](#) until it complies with international law. This campaign emerged in 2005 in answer to a call from 170 Palestinian civil society organisations, frustrated by the decades in which international governments and bodies had issued condemnations of Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people but refused to impose meaningful pressure.

The consequences of this failed policy were underlined in the last month, during which Israel's illegal occupation of East Jerusalem, the West bank and Gaza entered its 50th year. On 11 June the country's foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, [proudly announced](#) that Israel was planning its greatest expansion of settlement homes since 1992, one year before the [Oslo accords launched the so-called peace process](#). During that time the number of illegal settlers occupying the West Bank and East Jerusalem has grown by nearly half a million. On 20 June, as work started on the first illegal settlement to be built outside the

existing settlement blocks in 25 years, Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted “After decades, I have the privilege to be the prime minister who is building a new community in [Judea and Samaria](#)”. Or to put it in clearer language, here is a prime minister who feels privileged to be violating international law.

The BDS movement is a response to Israel’s confidence that it can act with impunity. Modelled on the same tactics used so successfully against apartheid South Africa, it calls on all actors to end economic support for Israel’s illegal actions.

The UK government’s attempts to force through the pension regulations were part and parcel of a wider attempt by Israel and its supporters to push back against the growing success of the BDS campaign. In April a [leaked joint report](#) from the Israeli thinktank the Reut Institute and the US Anti-Defamation League boasted of the success since 2010 in establishing a global pro-Israel network to suppress BDS activity, and the use of anti-BDS laws as a key tactic: 14 US states have introduced such legislation.

Theresa May must listen to the growing chorus of voices calling for an approach that truly holds Israel to account

Sir Ross Cranston’s judgment last week draws a line in the sand against the attempts to introduce such measures in the UK. It upholds the basic right to invest money on ethical principles.

For BDS campaigners in the UK this gives a huge boost to our work. A [recent YouGov poll](#) showed that public opinion is on our side with 43% of the public seeing BDS as a reasonable response to Israel’s policies and only 13% opposed. This judgment tells us that the law is with us as well. With this legal impediment removed, we will take forward the campaign to persuade all relevant bodies, including pension-fund holders, not to invest money in supporting activities that are illegal and violate human rights.

Margaret Thatcher found herself on the wrong side of history in the 1980s when she tried to prevent boycotts of apartheid South Africa. Last week, Theresa May told us that her government recognised the need to be humble, to listen to public opinion and rethink its approach to a range of issues. It’s time for her to acknowledge that current policy in the Middle East has failed and to listen to the growing chorus of voices calling for an approach that truly holds [Israel](#) to account.

Palestinian event in London faces ban over Hamas links

Communities secretary Sajid Javid has raised concerns that organisers of event at the South Bank support proscribed groups

Ewen MacAskill Last modified on Monday 26 June 2017 03:36 AEST

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/25/palestinian-event-in-london-faces-ban-over-hamas-links>



Communities Secretary Sajid Javid has yet to approve the Palestinian Expo due to begin on 8 July. Photograph: Stefan Wermuth/Reuters

One of the biggest Palestinian events in Europe scheduled to start in less than a fortnight is in doubt after intervention by the British government.

Palestinian Expo, which includes political discussions, concerts, comedy acts, workshops, a food court and other events, is scheduled to run at the QE2 centre in [London](#) on the weekend of 8 and 9 July. The organisers are expecting the event to attract about 10,000 people.

But the Department for Communities and Local Government, which is responsible for the QE2 Centre, wrote to the organisers on 14 June saying the secretary of state, [Sajid Javid](#), was minded to terminate the contract. The letter cited “concerns that your organisation and those connected with it have expressed public support for a proscribed organisation, namely Hamas, and that you have supported events at which Hamas and Hizballah – also proscribed – have been praised”.

The organisers, Friends of Al-Aqsa, wrote to the department complaining about the proposed ban. The department promised a decision by Friday. But on Friday, with just a fortnight to the opening, the department expressed regret that a decision had not yet been made, saying [Javid](#) had been busy with other recent events, an apparent reference to the [Grenfell Tower disaster](#).

Ismail Patel, founder of Friends of Al-Aqsa, said the department was unlawfully interfering in the event. “They have failed to provide any satisfactory reason as to why they have chosen to cancel an event which seeks to celebrate Palestinian culture and heritage,” he said. He accused the department of acting on hearsay from a pro-Israeli lobby group. He added: “Despite the threat from DCLG, we will make further efforts to hold Palestine Expo and will seek a judicial review of this unfair and unjust decision.”

Tickets for the event cost £20 each and 1,800 had been sold in the first few days. Since doubt was cast on the event on 14 June, only a further 300 have been sold, the organisers said.

THE AUSTRALIAN 

SA Labor goes it alone with call to recognise Palestine Verity Edwards 12:00AM June 27, 2017

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/state-politics/sa-labor-goes-it-alone-with-call-to-recognise-palestine/news-story/639ce53e41fed0a22a02e43b27d50490>

Labor has used its parliamentary majority in South Australia to call for the recognition of “the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel”, making it the only Australian legislative body to formally back Palestine statehood.

The amended motion, quietly passed in the lower house on budget day last week, calls on the Australian government to “recognise the state of Palestine (as we have recognised the state of Israel) and announce the conditions and time lines to achieve such recognition”.

The resolution, put forward by dumped Labor frontbencher Tony Piccolo, also seeks confirmation that unless measures are taken, a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict will “vanish”. The non-binding motion also opposes continuation of Israeli settlement building. A similar motion will be raised in the upper house by the Greens.

Mr Piccolo, who on the day the motion passed handed out fake newspapers to commuters to spruik the state budget, said Palestinians “have been the victims of dispossession for 70 years” and have “suffered under what could effectively be described as a military occupation for 50 years”.

Mr Piccolo was elected alongside Deputy Opposition Leader Vickie Chapman as co-convenor of the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, less than two years after the SA Parliamentary Friends of Israel was launched. Ms Chapman, a member of both groups,

joined Liberal MPs in unsuccessfully moving to adjourn the motion, and later spoke against it.

She said parliament should be “looking at how we advance and ensure the management of this in a structured way that is not just going to cause further discourse”.

Liberal frontbencher Dan van Holst Pellekaan said most state MPs “do not have nearly enough information to make a genuinely informed decision on this issue, which has perplexed the international community for decades”.

But Mr Piccolo, backed by Labor MPs including Katrine Hildyard and Nat Cook, accused the international community of “turning a blind eye ... at the victimisation, discrimination and injustices experienced by the Palestinian people in Israel”.

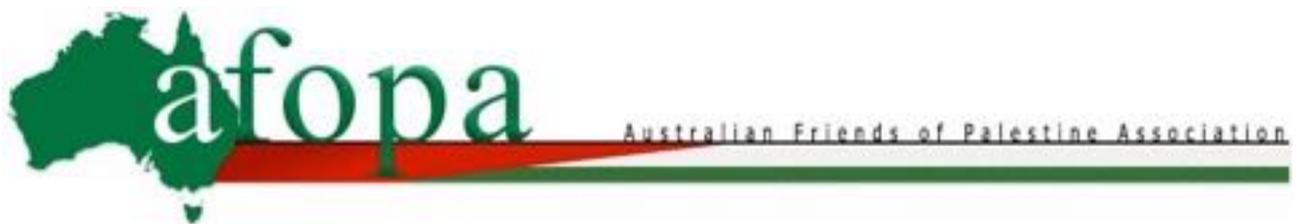
He said the UN General Assembly and 138 countries had recognised the state of Palestine, while 12 European parliaments had asked their governments to follow suit. “We are not breaking new ground here but we will hopefully be on the side of history,” Mr Piccolo said.

Anti-Defamation Commission chairman Dvir Abramovich slammed the motion as unhelpful, premature and harmful to chances for lasting reconciliation.

“With this one-sided and unconstructive motion, which turns reality inside out and which does not bother with the facts, the SA parliament has embraced long-time inaccuracies and misguided narratives,” Dr Abramovich said.

“Worse, the motion blames the Israeli government for the impasse, but fails to hold the Palestinian Authority responsible for their own obstructionist actions, particularly its continuous incitement and refusal to engage in bilateral talks.”

Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham, a South Australian, said the motion showed the “warped priorities” of the Weatherill government as the state faced the nation’s highest jobless rate and a crippling energy crisis. “It’s beyond laughable that the Weatherill government ... thinks they know the pathway to Middle East peace,” he said.



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“Why Palestine? Because it is a just cause, a noble ideal, a moral quest for equality and human rights” – Edward Saïd