

The Role That Minnesotans Can Play in Ending Oppression against Palestinians

by Sylvia Schwarz



The awareness of the situation in the Middle East among Americans has grown exponentially in the past few years. Since the 2008-2009 Israeli assault on Gaza, laying waste to the entire region and killing 1,400 people, more Americans are paying attention and becoming alarmed in the knowledge that not only do Americans' tax dollars go towards funding the fifth largest army in the world, whose weapons are used against civilians, but that Americans' charitable contributions, retirement funds investments, and consumer choices go to perpetuating international law violations and a brutal and inhumane occupation.

In 2005 Palestinian civil society called on the international community to institute boycotts, divestments and sanctions (BDS) against Israel until Israel complies with international law. The international community is responding with BDS actions all over the world, many of them within the United States. This non-violent and effective method at motivating governments to end repressive policies gives average people a role in ending human rights abuses and international law violations.

Following the call for BDS, Minnesota Break the Bonds Campaign (MN BBC) was founded to get the state to divest from the two Israel Bonds that it holds. These bonds are sold by the Development Corporation of Israel and the money is used to fund infrastructure projects, many of which are in illegal settlements of the West Bank. The total amount of Minnesota's investments in these bonds is about \$18.4 million.

Since its launch in 2006, MN BBC has held numerous events and meetings, acquired almost 2,000 signatures on postcards which will be delivered to Minnesota state representatives, coordinated a state-wide speaking tour, and held many film showings. The response has been tremendous, and when people see that they have a

personal role to play in ending the oppression in Israel, many are very willing to sign on and get further involved. We now have a website (<http://mn.breakthebonds.org>) where you can read some of our writings, sign our petition, and watch the MN BBC video. Contact mn@breakthebonds.org if you want to be involved in this exciting campaign!