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## For Israel, a reckoning

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The farce of the climate summit in Copenhagen affirmed a world war waged by the rich against most of humanity. It also illuminated a resistance growing perhaps as never before: an internationalism linking justice for the planet with universal human rights, and criminal justice for those who invade and dispossess with impunity. And the best news comes from Palestine.

The Palestinians' resistance to the theft of their country reached a critical moment in 2001 when a UN conference on racism in Durban, South Africa, identified Israel as an apartheid state. To Nelson Mandela, justice for the Palestinians is "the greatest moral issue of the age". The Palestinian civil society call for boycott, disinvestment and sanctions (BDS) was issued on 9 July 2005, in effect reconvening the great, non-violent movement that swept the world and brought the scaffolding of African apartheid crashing down.

"Through decades of occupation and dispossession," wrote Mustafa Barghouti, a wise voice of Palestinian politics, "90 per cent of the Palestinian struggle has been non-violent . . . A new generation of Palestinian leaders [now speaks] to the world precisely as Martin Luther King did. The same world that rejects all use of Palestinian violence, even clear self-defence, surely ought not begrudge us the non-violence employed by men such as King and Gandhi."

In the United States and Europe, trade unions, mainstream churches and academic associations have brought back the strategies that were used against apartheid South Africa. In a resolution adopted by 431 votes to 62, the US Presbyterian Church voted for a process of "phased, selective disinvestment" in multinational corporations doing business with Israel. This followed the opinion of the International Court of Justice that Israel's wall and its "settler" colonies were illegal. A similar declaration by the court in 1971, denouncing South Africa's occupation of Namibia, ignited the international boycott.

Like the South Africa campaign, the issue of law is central. No state is allowed to flout international law as wilfully as Israel. In 1990, a UN Security Council resolution demanding that Saddam Hussein get out of Kuwait was the same, almost word for word, as the one demanding that Israel get out of the West Bank. Iraq was driven out while Israel has been repeatedly rewarded. On 11 December, Barack Obama announced \$2.8bn in "aid" for Israel, part of the \$30bn US taxpayers will gift from their stricken economy during this decade.

The hypocrisy is now well understood in the US. A "Stolen Beauty" campaign pursues Ahava cosmetics, which are made in illegal West Bank "settlements"; last autumn it forced the firm to drop its "ambassador" Kristin Davis, a star of *Sex and the City*. In Britain, Sainsbury's and Tesco are under pressure to identify "settlement" products, whose sale contravenes human rights provisions in the European Union's trade agreement with Israel.

In Australia, a consortium led by Veolia lost its bid for a billion-dollar desalination plant following a campaign highlighting a plan, involving the French firm, to build a light rail connecting Jerusalem to the "settlements". In Norway, the government pension fund has withdrawn its investment in the Israeli hi-tech company Elbit Systems, which helped build the wall across Palestine. This is the first official boycott by a western country.

In 2005, Britain's Association of University Teachers (AUT) voted to boycott Israeli academic institutions complicit in the oppression of Palestinians. The AUT was forced to retreat when the Israel lobby unleashed a blizzard of character assassination and charges of anti-Semitism. The writer and activist Omar Barghouti called this "intellectual terror": a perversion of morality and logic that says to be against racism towards Palestinians makes one anti-Semitic. However, the Israeli assault on Gaza on 27 December 2008 changed almost everything. The US Campaign for an Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel was formed, with Desmond Tutu on its advisory board. In 2009, Britain's Trade Union Congress voted for a consumer boycott. The "Israel taboo" is no more.

Complementing this is the rapid development of international criminal law since the Pinochet case of 1998-99, when the former Chilean dictator was placed under house arrest in Britain. Israeli warmongers now face similar prosecution in countries that have "universal jurisdiction" laws. In Britain, the Geneva Conventions Act 1957 is fortified by the UN report on Gaza by Justice Richard Goldstone, which in December obliged a London magistrate to issue a warrant for the arrest of Tzipi Livni, the former Israeli foreign minister wanted for crimes against humanity. And in September, only contrived diplomatic immunity rescued Ehud Barak, Israel's defence minister during the assault on Gaza, from arrest by Scotland Yard.

Just over a year ago, 1,400 defenceless people in Gaza were murdered by the Israelis. On 29 December, Mohamed Jassier became the 367th Gazan to die because even those needing life-saving medical treatment are not allowed free passage out. Keep that in mind when you next watch the BBC "balance" such suffering with the weasel protestations of the oppressors.

There is a clear momentum now. To mark the first anniversary of the Gaza atrocity, a humanitarian procession from 42 countries - Muslims, Jews, Christians, atheists, old and young, trade unionists, writers, artists, musicians and those leading

convoys of food and medicine - converged on Egypt. And even though the US-bribed dictatorship in Cairo prevented most from proceeding to Gaza, the people in that open prison knew they were not alone, and children climbed on walls and raised the Palestinian flag. And this is just a beginning.

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