

Solidarity With Palestinian Workers

Proposed Resolution to December 2004 USLAW Conference

Submitted by Michael Letwin, USLAW Steering Committee Member

On Behalf of New York City Labor Against the War (NYCLAW)

December 2, 2004

USLAW condemns the Israeli government's recent attack on the Workers Advice Center, a Palestine-based non-governmental organization that advocates labor rights for Palestine's exploited Arab workforce [see attached].

Furthermore, USLAW will:

1. Participate in a U.S. labor delegation to examine the conditions of Palestinian workers, followed by a speaking tour at labor bodies and other locations to report on those conditions.
2. Organize discussion within USLAW of whether to join Labor for Palestine [see attached], and a growing number of religious bodies, to call for an end to U.S. government and AFL-CIO aid to Israel.

Attachments

The Israeli Government is Trying to De-legitimize and Dismantle the Workers Advice Center (WAC – Ma'an), Attack on Palestinian and Migrant Workers

Posted by: Admin on Nov 25, 2004 - 02:25 AM
Organizing Palestinian Workers Dear Friends,

The Registrar of Non-Profit Associations (NPA's) in Israel, Attorney Yaron Kedar, has decided to start procedures toward canceling the legal status of the Workers Advice Center (WAC, referred to as MA'AN in Arabic and Hebrew). He claims that WAC has not been acting in accordance with its stated goal: to defend workers' rights. Rather, he says, "The NPA acted in cooperation with other NPA's to advance the interests of the political party known as the ODA" (the Organization for Democratic Action – or Da'am in Arabic). He states, in particular, that WAC has served as a conduit of funds to the ODA.

These claims are unfounded. Since its registration as an NPA in the year 2000, WAC

has been devoting all its energy and resources to advance the interests of under-represented workers, especially Arabs, by organizing them into work teams, finding them jobs with construction companies, and representing them in their battles with Israeli bureaucracy. All of WAC's financial records were provided to the Registrar. He did not find a single shekel that went from WAC, or through WAC, to the ODA.

The Registrar's decision has no basis in fact, but it does have a historical and political background, which you will find in the supplements attached to this letter.

Yesterday, November 17, we at WAC established an Action Committee to Defend WAC. We are planning to conduct an intensive public campaign, local and international. In this letter we ask you to take part.

The legal procedure we face is this: The Registrar has given us 14 days to appeal against a fine of 30,000 NIS, levied to cover costs of his investigation. He has given us 30 days to decide

whether we agree to accept a program of "recovery," including a "chaperone" (whose salary would be paid by WAC). This person would accompany WAC until the registrar is satisfied that WAC has undergone reform. This procedure would mean, in effect, that WAC would lose its independence; its policy decisions would be directed by the Israeli Authorities.

If we refuse the recovery program (as we shall, since we have no illness from which to recover), the Registrar will go to court to persuade the latter to dismantle WAC. The Israeli Law of Associations defines the procedure for dismantling a registered association like WAC: the Registrar has to petition the District Court, and the burden of proof is on him. WAC will oppose his petition when it is filed (probably in January or even later).

Below you will find the following documents:

1. A press release
2. A background paper
3. Our letter to the ILO
4. A letter from the Spanish Union CC.OO (one of WAC's donors) to Israel's Ambassador in Spain. See also their website with the campaign they have opened on WAC's behalf: Spanish Union CC.OO
5. A list of Israeli institutions that should be approached by organizations and individuals

These documents will give you the necessary background and tools to launch the campaign in your country.

We shall create a website on which to post these documents, along with news items on the struggle.

WAC is going through the most important battle of its existence. At stake are the rights of Arab and Jewish workers to organize!

Our basic plan of action is as follows:

1. To convene WAC workers for a general assembly of the organization.
2. To get the press to write about the case.
3. To publish a large petition in Ha'aretz (Israel's newspaper of record) against the Registrar's decision. The petition will include the signatures of local and international figures, including members of NGO's (NPA's), Trade Unions, organizations of law, people of law, human-rights activists and all supporters of the case. Soon people will be able to sign on our website, but the process can begin soon, when I will send you a final version. To publish the petition as a full page in Haaretz will cost

\$5000. We ask individual signers to pay between \$15-30. We ask organizations to contribute between \$200\$ and \$500, according to their means.

4. We shall publish a protest postcard, featuring a photograph of WAC's workers, directed to the Minister of Justice. The postcard can be adapted by unions and organizations to their own language.

5. We will hold demonstrations and discussion panels. We shall involve other NGOs in the struggle.

What can you do?

* A] First, we would like to hear your opinions and suggestions.

* B] Each Israeli Embassy/Consulate should be put under the pressure of faxes, letters, delegations and pickets.

* C] Your letter of condemnation should be send to the Israeli authorities (see list below). A copy of your letter should be sent by fax/or e-mail to: 972-3-6839148 orasafadiv@netvision.net.

* D] Your participation in the petition and postcard campaign will be important.

* E] Spread this mail to other organizations dealing with labor and human rights in your country. You can post the details of the campaign on your website.

* F] Conduct screenings of our documentary film, A Job to Win (50 Minutes) (We can supply versions in Arabic, Hebrew, English, and Galegan on demand). The video documents WAC's struggle to organize Arab construction workers and put them back on the job. Your union/ organization/ group can take it upon itself to dub the film into your local language.

Please update us through this e-mail address as to your actions and needs. We hope to work closely with you.

In struggle we shall win!

Roni Ben Efrat (Ms)

International Relations, WAC

<http://www.al-awdany.org/lfp/laborletter.html>

Labor for Palestine

Dear Fellow Trade Unionists and Workers:

International solidarity, the right of national self-determination, and social justice are among the most basic trade union principles. These principles have been reflected in labor opposition to the Vietnam War in the 1960s, in labor's demand for divestment from South African apartheid and opposition to U.S. intervention in Central America in the 1980s, and to U.S. war and occupation in Iraq today.

Trade unionists who have taken these positions have often faced intense criticism. In response, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. expressed his support for the National Labor Leadership Assembly for Peace, by pointing out that, “[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. . . . Ultimately a genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus.”¹

In that spirit, we ask you to join us in Labor For Palestine.

The establishment of Israel in 1948 inflicted on the Palestinian people a continuing campaign of displacement, discrimination, exploitation and brutality that has continued to this day. This includes:

- * Displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians and the continuing refusal to allow over 5 million refugees to return home

- * Deprivation of Palestinian human and civil rights, including discriminatory laws, home demolitions, and water and other resource theft;

- * Apartheid-like checkpoints and roadblocks that restrict freedom of movement;

- * Denial of education and basic public services to Palestinian villages and to Palestinians within Israel (“Israeli Arabs”);

- * Palestinians are denied access, lease or ownership to 91% of the lands occupied in 1948;

- * Construction of illegal colonial settlements on land stolen and occupied by armed and violent settlers;

- * Ongoing and brutal military occupation of Palestine, in which US-made helicopters, fighter planes and weaponry are used daily to carry out murder and collective punishment;

- * Harsh travel restrictions on Palestinians leading to massive unemployment and poverty;

- * Construction of an apartheid wall (declared illegal by the International Court of Justice), that confiscates even more Palestinian land, and encircles Palestinian towns in a giant, 24-foot-high prison studded with armed watchtowers;

- * Ongoing incarceration of over 7,000 political prisoners, including children and political leaders, often in horrendous conditions, and the ongoing practice of administrative detention, in which Palestinians may be held without trial for six months or more.

These conditions have taken a particular toll on Palestinian workers. Last April, fourteen trade unionists from seven European countries found that:

“The majority of workers in Israel’s construction branch, including Palestinians, migrants and Israeli citizens (mostly Arabs), are still today subject to extreme forms of exploitation. The Israeli authorities lag behind legislation elsewhere in several ways: they refrain from ratifying recent labor conventions; they do not enforce their own labor laws; they exploit the excuse of ‘security considerations’ in a disproportional manner; they apply the law selectively; and they close their eyes to the criminality of the contractors and the personnel companies.”

Like any oppressed people, the Palestinian people have courageously resisted. For example, Palestinian workers have organized unions and labor organizations throughout Palestinian society, some of which have been devastated by the massive unemployment caused by closure and economic entrapment. Palestinian workers have consistently used the general strike as a tool of protest and struggle against occupation and oppression; in fact, the longest general strike in the world was that organized by Palestinian workers in 1936 against British colonialism.

For decades, this wholesale denial of Palestinian rights has been condemned by trade unionists around the world. Seeing the close parallels between Israeli and South African apartheid, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), has called upon the trade union movement internationally to mobilize its support behind the people of Palestine.²

In Britain, trade unionists have joined with Palestinian labor leaders and the Trade Unionists for Palestine to support Palestinian rights.³ Additionally, Irish trade union leaders, including those of SIPTU, a service and professional workers’ union, have condemned the ongoing occupation of Palestinian land and the oppression of Palestinians.⁴

Lastly, the World Federation of Trade Unions,⁵ an international body representing hundreds of millions of workers, has called for “immediate action to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate right to return and to self-determination and to establish their national and independent state with Jerusalem as capital.”

In the U.S., however, government and private institutions - including many labor bodies - have actively contributed to this oppression:

- * The U.S. government provides more aid to Israel than to any other nation in the world. This amounts to more than \$5 billion annually, or a daily average of \$15,139,178.

- * This aid provides Israel with massive quantities of U.S.-made Apache helicopters, F-16 fighter jets

and assault rifles - all of which is used to devastate Palestinian communities.

* Unlike the aid given to other nations, this aid is unrestricted by human rights conditions, and is paid in lump-sum format annually.

* In addition, many individual U.S. states invest workers' pension funds in the occupation of Palestine, an example of which is New Jersey's recent purchase of \$20 million in Israel Bonds.

* And shockingly, AFL-CIO affiliate pension funds have over \$300 million invested in Israeli bonds.⁶

It is clearer now than ever that Israel's war on the Palestinian people reflects imperial domination throughout the Middle East. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between scenes of occupation and resistance in Jenin, Falluja and Baghdad.

We, therefore, have a profound moral obligation to recognize and end the complicity of U.S. government and labor with Israeli apartheid.

For these reasons, the April 2004 convention of Al-Awda NY (the Palestine right to return coalition) unanimously adopted a proposal by New York City Labor Against the War to ask all labor bodies to:

1. Fully support Palestinian national, democratic and labor rights throughout historic Palestine, including the right of all Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and land.
2. Demand an end to U.S. military and economic support for Israeli Apartheid.
3. Divest all labor investments in Israeli Apartheid.
4. Affiliate with Labor For Palestine.

Notes

1. http://www.aavw.org/special_features/speeches_speech_king03.html
2. http://www.iacenter.org/palest_cuba-sa.htm
3. http://www.palestinecampaign.org/trade_unions.asp
4. <http://student.cs.ucc.ie/cs1064/jabowen/IPSC/php/db.php?aid=4209>
5. <http://www.wftu.cz>
6. For all of the above, see:
<http://www.sonomacountyfreepress.com/palestine/union.html>;
http://www.ifamericansknew.org/stats/cost_of_i

srael.html; and
<http://www.ifamericansknew.org/stats/usaid.html>