

Gush Shalom FAQs on the Boycott of Settlement Goods

Gush Shalom, is the hard core of the Israeli peace movement. For years, Gush Shalom has played a leading role in determining the moral and political agenda of the peace forces in Israel, as well as in breaking the so-called "national consensus" based on misinformation.

Gush Shalom is an extra-parliamentary organisation, independent of any party or other political grouping. Some of its activists do belong to political parties, but the Gush is not aligned to any particular party. The primary aim of Gush Shalom is to influence Israeli public opinion and lead it towards peace and conciliation with the Palestinian people.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. ***Isn't Imposing An Economic Boycott Over A Group Of Citizens An Anti-Democratic Act?***

On the contrary. No other public action is more democratic.

An economic boycott is a non-violent act, enabling all citizens to express their views through their available means, without imposing these views on others, without the need for an organization or political identification. Any man and woman may use their money as they wish in preferring one product over another.

For instance: The Orthodox community imposes a permanent economic boycott over products which do not carry a kosher certificate by their Court of Justice (BADAZ). They also regularly boycott companies and banks who, in their opinion, support the desecration of graves or the Shabath. No one can prevent them from doing so. To us, destroying the peace and war mongering are no better than eating pork is to the Orthodox.

Opponents of scientific experiments in animals boycott products made by companies who utilize the results of these experiments.

We express our view, that the settlements are wreaking havoc over the State of Israel - by boycotting their products. What could be more democratic?

2. ***Isn't Boycotting The Settlements Similar To The Nazis' Boycott On The Jews?***

By its nature, a boycott is an instrument of the powerless against the powerful, used by those without access to the power mechanisms, who are therefore forced to organize voluntarily from the grassroots. Indeed, the Nazis have abused the boycott instrument to promote the causes of oppression and racism, just as they have abused, on their way to power, the freedom of speech, the electoral process, parliamentary activity and other democratic means. But there is absolutely no similarity between the Nazi boycott and other boycotts, just as there is no resemblance between a Nazi election campaign and any election campaign by a democratic party.

Incidentally, the Jews beat the Nazis in declaring a global boycott over Nazi Germany, immediately upon Hitler's rise to power. Had this boycott succeeded, the Nazi regime may not have reached that far.

The boycott against the settlements products is a voluntary action by peace-loving Israelis, setting out against settlers who possess a power mechanism that is strong enough to coerce all of Israel's governments to date. They force the government to foreclose Palestinian lands on their behalf, to send thousands of soldiers and policemen to serve as their personal bodyguards, and to grant them gigantic budget chunks of our tax money. Money robbed from Israel's disadvantaged classes, development towns and poor neighborhoods.

The boycott over settlements products is a distinct tool of peace and justice seekers, against the entire establishment of the settlements, whose essence is racism, oppression and deprivation. In this respect, our boycott constitutes yet another link in the global chain of similar boycott actions.

3. ***Examples?***

All the democratic powers in the world have joined in totally boycotting the racist regime in South-Africa. That boycott has eventually resulted in the mobilization of political factors the world over, who have finally overthrown the apartheid regime.

Gandhi, the Indian freedom fighter who preached against violence, employed the economic boycott weapon.

For years progressive elements in the US have maintained a boycott against California fruit growers, due to their shameful treatment of Mexican laborers. This boycott has also proved successful.

Democratic organizations in the US are currently calling for a boycott over the products of giant commercial corporations who exploit the work of Asian children under appalling conditions.

4. ***How Do The Settlers Obstruct The Peace Process?***

Ever since Moshe Levinger has deployed the first group of settlers in Hebron, by ways of deception and mendacity (they promised the military governor that they were only going there to conduct a Seder Pessach ceremony), all the settlements are aimed at a single political objective: to forestall any possibility of peace with the Palestinians. The opponents of peace know very well that such peace could only be established if Israel allows the Palestinian people to build their state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The settlements were intended to create a reality which would preclude the possibility of ever returning these territories to the Palestinians.

This objective is clearly manifested in the field: Most of the settlements have been established on top of hills, like outguards overlooking the area, also in order to provoke the Palestinians, whose villages are usually built downhill.

The intention is to control, and so is the result. The implication: A small minority in the Israeli public imposes its will on the entire state, and dictates to the overwhelming majority an endless war.

5. ***Aren't These Generalizations?***

True, not all settlers are of one piece. The orthodox-nationalistic-messianic hard core has settled there to "create facts in the field", which would render any compromise with the Palestinian unfeasible. This group has spawned ideological murderers such as Baruch Goldstein and Yigal Amir. On the other hand, there are those who have settled in the Palestinian Territories only "to find a quality of life", or splendid homes for peanuts, or an easy life at the state's expense. Some have gone there innocently, without giving it much thought.

All settlers, however, have one thing in common: They knew very well that they were settling beyond the Green Line, on land taken by force from another people. No one is forcing them to stay there. Each and every one of them is free to leave and come back to the State of Israel. The government will have to help them to do that, if they so demand.

6. ***Didn't Many Of Them Settle On State Lands, Property Of The Government Of Israel?***

"State Land" is a fabrication, invented in order to rob the land from the Palestinians.

This property is the land reserves of Palestinian villages and towns - land allocated for the natural expansion of these communities, for public buildings, etc. During the Ottoman Rule, this property was usually registered in the name of the Sultan, in order to prevent conflicts. The Sultan was replaced by the British Mandate government, and later the Jordanian government. After 1967, the Israeli Occupation Rule pretended to be the legal owner of these lands. Handing these lands over to the settlers is plain pillage. Without those lands Palestinian communities are unable to develop, provide housing for the next generations, build schools and mosques, etc.

This is not the only law used as a legal tool by the land robbers. The occupation authorities have utilized ancient laws and devised new ones, "for by wise counsel thou shalt make thy settlements". For instance, they used an Ottoman law stipulating that any lot of property where the voice of a man standing at the center of the village cannot be heard, belongs to the Sultan by default.

Many properties have been foreclosed under pretexts of "security needs" and "public needs", construction of "bypass roads" and so on.

Not only lands were stolen, water too. Huge amounts of water, necessary for the development of Palestinian agriculture as well simply for drinking, have been handed over to the settlements. The settlers, who constitute less than a tenth of the number of West Bank inhabitants, have received an amount of water larger than that of the entire Palestinian population.

7. ***Why Can't Jews Live In Palestinian Territory, Just As The Arab Citizens Live In The State Of Israel?***

There's no place for this comparison. The Arab citizens of Israel have been living on their land for generations. No one questions their right over their land. The settlers, on the other hand, have been forcibly implanted in our time on the land of another people.

The Palestinian leaders have repeatedly declared that they have no objection in principle to Jews living in the Palestinian State, when it is established, as peaceful citizens who accept the law of the land, just as the Christians and the Muslims do. The Mayor of Hebron, for instance, has invited the descendants of the Old Jewish settlers in Hebron to return to the city. According to him, Hebron residents will welcome orthodox Jews who honestly wish to live and study the Holy Bible in the city that is sacred to them too.

But the settlers do not even dream of living in Palestinian territory, and the idea that they will ever accept the Palestinian citizenship and Palestinian law is preposterous to them. They feel they are the Lords of the Land, they will never consent to be someone else's "subjects" , certainly not a Palestinian government. Some of their leaders have announced more than once that their purpose is to cause the ousting of the Arabs from the entire territory of Greater Eretz-Israel, so that the Whole Eretz-Israel would be 'strictly kosher' Jewish. Abroad, this is called " ethnic purification " .

8. ***Doesn't The Call For Boycott Express Hate For The Settlers?***

We are not motivated by hatred. We are not boycotting the settlers, but the products of the settlements.

We call upon the settlers to return to Israel, and raise their contribution to the development of the State. Immediately following the Oslo Accords we publicly urged Prime Minister Rabin to promptly announce that any settler wishing to return to Israel willingly, shall receive a generous government relocation grant.

Moreover: If these industries wish to continue manufacturing under Palestinian law and administration, and if the Palestinian Authority (and eventually, the government of the Palestinian State) will have no objections, there will no longer be cause for a national boycott.

9. ***Won't The Boycott Harm The Palestinian Laborers Currently Employed At The Settlements Industries?***

This argument is often used against boycotts in general. It has been used frequently against the international boycott on South Africa, saying said that the sanctions harm not the racist regime, but the black laborers.

In response to this, the African National Congress, led by Nelson Mandela, has issued an explicit call to disregard this argument, because the downfall of the apartheid regime far outweighs any other consideration, even in the eyes of the laborers themselves.

The exploitation of Palestinian labor, mostly under outrageous conditions, cannot be used as a pretext against boycotting. If the boycott succeeds, these industries will be forced to relocate in planned for implementation under Israeli-Palestinian collaboration, where Palestinian laborers would be able to earn their living.

10. ***What's The Difference Between Ramla And Ram'alla? The Kibbutzim, Moshavim And Towns In Israel Inside The Green Line Are Also Sitting On Land Which Used To Be Arab?***

This is the settlers' most popular demagogic claim, and its ostensible merit is merely illusive.

During a bloody historical conflict, which has been going on for over a hundred years, many grievances, which deserve historical research and discussion, have occurred on both sides. But following the war in 1948 a reality has been created, which peace seekers in both nations, along with the entire civilized world, have come to accept.

Like most borders in the world, the Green Line has been arbitrarily marked by the events of the war and later agreements (As is well known, the Triangle border was created following an agreement with King Abdalla of Jordan, who handed over to Israel several Arab villages). But the world accepts the principle, that existing borders - in our case, the borders set in place since 1949 - shall remain intact, and may not be changed again through war or occupation. This is also the basis for the UN resolution 242 and the international conventions to which Israel is a party.

The overwhelming majority of the Palestinian people recognize the State of Israel within the Green Line borders, and this recognition has been confirmed when close to 90% of the Palestinians voted for Yasser Arafat after his signing the Oslo Accords. On the other hand, no known Palestinian has ever consented to peace which is based on appending any additional territories to Israel.

11. ***Don't You See Any Difference between Judea and Samaria settlers and Golan Heights Settlers?***

In principle, there is no difference. Indeed, Golan Heights settlers are usually less fanatic than " Yesha " settlers, and they did go there at the consent of Labor governments (which is why some people call them " mityashvim " (which in Hebrew sounds slightly more favorable than the colonially-associated " mitnachalim "). But they are both obstructing peace and bringing war to our door. Both are occupying a plundered land.

The Syrian Highlands (as it has been called prior to the Six Days War) was a densely populated area. The residents of dozens of Syrian villages - myriads of people - live in Syria as refugees, longing to return to their land. There is no chance of peace with Syria, our most dangerous neighbor, without giving back the entire Golan Heights. Yitzhak Rabin has recognized this fact when he notified the Americans that he was willing to give back the entire Heights, back to the June 4 1967 line, in return for a full peace.

The war currently waged in Lebanon, demanding precious victims almost daily, is part of our conflict with Syria, that is, a direct result of our occupation of the Golan Heights. And even that deadly toll is nothing compared to the anticipated war with Syria, in which poisonous gas missiles will hit the cities of Israel.

Nevertheless, a boycott is a democratic act by nature. Whoever maintains that boycotting West Bank and Gaza Strip settlements is justified, but boycotting the Golan settlements is not, should act accordingly. We do not impose our opinions on anybody.

12. ***How Can An Economic Boycott Help to Achieve Peace?***

The boycott shall give voice to the objection of the Israeli majority to the settlements.

It will serve as a barrier against further investments in the settlements. The government promises extreme benefits as incentives to investors, but they would think twice before risking a boycott by large parts of the public.

The boycott will be a major tool for alleviating the frustration and sense of helplessness, plaguing so many Israelis. The boycott conveys a general message: You are not helpless. You can act. Your duty is not done at the polls once every four years. You must act everyday to save the state and its values.

13. *How Can I Contribute To The Success Of The National Boycott?*

A lot.

- Download the list and when you do your shopping, Look at the product label to find out its origin. Reject any product made in a settlement. Prefer any other Israeli-made product, even if its price is slightly higher or its quality slightly lower.
- When in doubt, ask the store manager, preferably in a loud voice.
- Draw the attention of other shoppers, as well as that of friends, neighbors and other acquaintances, to products made in settlements, and explain the issue to them.
- Get a list of settlement-made products from the campaign headquarters (address listed below), make photocopies and distribute the list as much as possible.
- Identify additional settlement-made products and send us the details so we can update the list. If possible, enclose the labels too, for documentation.

Presented by

National Boycott Headquarters

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