

The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) is a wide coalition of the largest Palestinian mass organizations, trade unions, networks and organizations.

BNC member organizations:

Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine

Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)

Palestinian Nat'l Institute for NGOs

Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition

Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS (PTUC-BDS)

Federation of Indep. Trade Unions

Gen. Union of Palestinian Workers

Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions

Gen. Union of Palestinian Women

Union of Palestinian Farmers

Gen. Union of Palestinian Teachers

Gen. Union of Palestinian Writers

Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUE)

Union of Professional Associations

Gen. Union of Palestinian Peasants

Union of Public Employees in Palestine-Civil Sector

Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (STW)

Nat'l Committee for Grassroots Resistance

Pal. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)

Nat'l Committee to Commemorate the Nakba

Civic Coalition for the Defense of Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem

Coalition for Jerusalem

Union of Pal. Charitable Organizations

Palestinian Economic Monitor

Union of Youth Activity Centers- Palestine Refugee Camps

Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Initiative

## Open call to Wikimania: 'Edit' occupation and apartheid out of Palestine!

26-7-2011

**Occupied Palestine-** Wikimania's decision to hold its annual conference this August in Israel despite its ongoing occupation, colonialism and apartheid can only be seen by Palestinians and international supporters of a just peace as feeding Israel's impunity and helping it to cover up its grave violations of international law and Palestinian rights. Given Israel's intensifying ethnic cleansing in occupied Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, and the Naqab (Negev), its deadly siege on Gaza, and the spread of its illegal colonial settlements, any international conference held in Israel cannot but be a political decision that insists on colluding with Israel. It is also a deep insult to Palestinian civil society which has almost unanimously called for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it fully abides by its obligations under international law. Furthermore, in light of the recent revelation that Wikimania is to be partially sponsored by the East Jerusalem Development Company (EJDC)<sup>1</sup>, a state-owned company involved in colonial activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) calls on Wikimedia to reject this sponsorship and calls for the event to be moved from Israel. If it fails to do both, we call on all people of conscience to boycott this Wikimania conference of complicity and shame.

The EJDC is an Israeli government-owned company, which is responsible for "the development and operation of tourist sites in eastern and great Jerusalem"<sup>2</sup>. Under international law Jerusalem is illegally occupied territory and Israel's settlement enterprise there is in stark violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention which states that "the occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own population into the territory it occupies."<sup>3</sup> In 1967, Israel occupied East Jerusalem, unilaterally annexing it as part of its "united capital." The world community does not recognize any part of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, particularly because under UN General Assembly resolution 181 (1947) Jerusalem was established as a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People confirmed that city's status remains such<sup>4</sup>.

The activities of the EJDC means the company is not only complicit with violations of international law, but is also guilty of actively exacerbating the ongoing suffering and displacement of the Palestinian people. Nowhere is this more evident than in the East Jerusalem area of Silwan, where the Jerusalem municipality is planning to convert the Wadi Hilweh and Al-Bustan neighbourhoods into a settler-run archaeological park. For this to succeed it will require the demolition of an estimated 88 homes, leaving approximately 1,500 Palestinian homeless.<sup>5</sup>

The project in Silwan cannot be viewed in isolation and has to be considered in the context of Israel's wider colonization and apartheid policies in Jerusalem and Palestine in general. With its 2020 urban development plan for Jerusalem,

Israel aims to consolidate its hold on occupied East Jerusalem through increasing the number of settlers there and reducing the Palestinian population from. To further this goal, Israel has used covert means to revoke the residency permits of thousands of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and effectively ethnically cleanse them from the city. This tactic has been speeded up rapidly in recent years with almost 50% of the total revocations of permits since the illegal annexation of Jerusalem in 1967 occurring between 2006 and 2008.<sup>6</sup>

This is symptomatic of the historic and current Zionist aims of Jewish settlement and displacement of the indigenous population. The organisers of Wikimania boast that “Haifa is commonly portrayed as model of co-existence between Arabs and Jews in Israel”<sup>7</sup>. This image, carefully promoted by the state of Israel at great expense, is a smokescreen to obscure a reality of racism, institutional discrimination, suppression of identity and ethnic cleansing that the Palestinian citizens of Israel continue to face. It was in Haifa, in April of 1948, that Zionist forces committed what Israeli historian Ilan Pappé calls an “urbicide”<sup>8</sup>, the destruction of urban space and expulsion of its residents, leaving only 2,000 of the 70, 000 Palestinians of Haifa remaining in the city.

Haifa’s expulsion was not unique. About two thirds of Palestinian society was expelled in 1948, making today the world’s largest refugee population. While the conference maybe in concurrence with the “celebration” of the 250-year history of modern Haifa, it ignores the events that shaped the present reality. Palestinians citizens of Israel, comprising 20 percent of Israel’s recognized population, are discriminated against with 30 laws specifically privileging Jews over non-Jews, owing to Israel’s self-definition as an ethnic Jewish state. Palestinians inside Israel are commonly referred to as a “fifth column” or a “demographic time-bomb”<sup>9</sup>. As a result, Israeli leaders have taken steps to institute a “loyalty oath” that would force Palestinians to swear allegiance to a “Jewish state” or risk losing citizenship<sup>10</sup>. Most recently, Israel passed a draconian anti-boycott law that tramples on freedom of speech by effectively banning expression of support for boycott, a non-violent for of resistance to Israel's oppression<sup>11</sup>. In this light, prestigious international events such as this are attempts to whitewash Israel’s racist policies and gain acceptance to them.<sup>12</sup>

Wiki users come from all corners of the world and form a community without borders. Hosting the conference in Israel tarnishes these universalist values. The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) appeals to members of the Wikimedia community to stay true to their commitment to openness as well as to a sense of justice and moral consistency, and move the 2011 Wikimania conference from Haifa. This is the bare minimal form of solidarity that we expect from any people of conscience around the world to support our struggle for freedom, justice and a meaningful peace in our region.

Wikimedia, we admire your dedication to bringing free and open content to the world. We ask you, as a people being denied our freedom, to refuse to whitewash the colonial and apartheid rule under which we live.

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1 <http://www.alternativenews.org/english/index.php/topics/jerusalem/3688-wikimania-2011-sponsored-by-israeli-government-company-that-develops-east-jerusalem>

2 <http://www.pami.co.il/eng/index.html>

3 <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/WebART/380-600056>

4 <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/651C804E6815FB28852575DF004B7C4C>

5 <http://electronicintifada.net/content/process-transfer-continues-jerusalem-municipality-plans-demolish-88-houses-silwan-east>

6 <http://www.acri.org.il/en/?p=1929>

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- 7 [http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimania\\_2011/Bids/Haifa/Q%26A](http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimania_2011/Bids/Haifa/Q%26A)
  - 8 <http://mondediplo.com/2010/03/13haifa>
  - 9 <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article9428.shtml>
  - 10 <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/07/20107199346452716.html>
  - <sup>11</sup> <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2011/bnc-responds-law-7583>
  - 12 <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11093.shtml>