

## Palestinian civil society to Oxfam: “match words with action”, break ties with Scarlett Johansson

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 (PFUPE)

Union of Professional Associations

Gen. Union of Palestinian Peasants

Union of Public Employees in Palestine-Civil Sector

Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (STW)

Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC)

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

*Occupied Palestine, January 27* - The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC), the largest coalition in Palestinian civil society, including trade unions, political parties, popular committees and NGOs, calls on Oxfam to immediately sever ties with Hollywood actor Scarlett Johansson over her vocal support for illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian territory.<sup>1</sup>

SodaStream markets itself as environmentally friendly, but this hides an ugly truth: the company is a colonial enterprise with its main production facility located in the settlement of Maale Adumim in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT). Settlements are illegal under international law and constitute a war crime.<sup>2</sup>

Johansson's defense of her public relations role with occupation profiteer SodaStream undermines Oxfam's stated opposition to economic relations with illegal Israeli settlements. Oxfam cannot credibly oppose illegal Israeli settlements in the OPT, describing them as a root cause for poverty among Palestinians, while maintaining as an ambassador somebody who has deemed it appropriate to describe the establishment of an Israeli settlement factory on land from which Palestinians have been ethnically cleansed as a form of “economic cooperation”.

Oxfam has said in a statement that it is in “dialogue” with Johansson over her SodaStream promotion deal.<sup>3</sup> However it has become increasingly clear that this “dialogue” has not yielded positive results and Johansson's position has been made crystal clear.

We rebuke Johansson's condescending remarks that SodaStream is “building a bridge to peace between Israel and Palestine”. This position seems to come directly from the company's propaganda textbook and has been consistently refuted by Palestinians.<sup>4</sup> It is not for Johansson to lecture Palestinians on what is good for them. Palestinians are not employed in Israeli settlements as a matter of freewill; they are subjects to a captive economy, which settlements have been a key component in decimating,<sup>5</sup> and they have largely lost their lands and sources of income due to Israel's occupation and colonization.

Palestinian trade unions and civil society organisations have consistently rejected any suggestion that the oppressive reality of living under a brutal occupation -- sometimes leaving Palestinians with no choice but to export fresh produce through complicit Israeli companies or work in illegal settlements -- is a reason not to take action to end international complicity

in human rights violations.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Palestinian workers employed by SodaStream have explained that they face systematic discrimination and are “treated like slaves”.

SodaStream is a key beneficiary of Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land and of the denial of self-determination to Palestinians. The company benefits from government subsidies and tax-breaks established to encourage businesses to operate in Israeli settlements, allowing them to become viable and flourish.

The land on which SodaStream’s factory operates was forcefully taken from Palestinians. According to Oxfam, the Israeli army forcefully expelled 200 Palestinian families from their homes to make space for the construction of Maale Adumim in the early 1990s.<sup>7</sup> Israel has recently announced a plan to expel another 2,300 Palestinians to make way for the settlement’s growth, stealing more Palestinian land.<sup>8</sup> SodaStream and other companies that operate in illegal Israeli settlements are very much part and parcel of this system of oppression.

In recent days this issue attracted an enormous amount of controversy in the international press as well as in social media with Oxfam being a focus of attention. As a coalition that includes many of Oxfam’s longstanding partners, we contend that there is a clear choice to be made between celebrity and principle. A refusal to part ways with Johansson will tarnish the charity’s credibility among Palestinians and many people of conscience around the world. Oxfam has consistently opposed illegal Israeli settlements and recently made a call to the European Union to “match words with action”<sup>9</sup>. Oxfam must now heed its own advice and do the same.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/24/scarlett-johansson-sodastream-statement\\_n\\_4661945.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/24/scarlett-johansson-sodastream-statement_n_4661945.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1\\_cha\\_chapter38\\_rule130](http://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_cha_chapter38_rule130)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/scarlett-johansson-blasted-by-oxfam-over-israeli-campaign-deal-9083827.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://whoprofits.org/content/palestinian-workers-settlements>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.haaretz.co.il/st/inter/Hheb/images/worldbankctar.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2013/palestinian-agricultural-org-call-10515>

<sup>7</sup> <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/on-the-brink-israeli-settlements-and-their-impact-on-palestinians-in-the-jordan-232131>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_communities\\_jerusalem\\_factsheet\\_june\\_2013\\_english.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_communities_jerusalem_factsheet_june_2013_english.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org/en/eu/pressroom/reactions/oxfam-welcomes-europes-unprecedented-criticism-israeli-government-west-bank-policies>