

PRESS STATEMENT: Cancellation of S.African Water Conference with Israeli Ambassador - 15 February 2016

Press Statement: On the Cancellation of an upcoming water conference with the Israeli Ambassador

The human rights and Palestine solidarity organisation BDS South Africa welcomes news of the cancellation of an upcoming water conference that was to be hosted by the prominent South African weekly, the Mail & Guardian, which would have had the Israeli Ambassador Arthur Lenk as a panellist.

We furthermore welcome a) the pledge by some of the sponsors and organisers that if ever a similar event is organised in future that it will not include the Israeli Ambassador to South Africa; and b) the assertion by South Africa's Ministry of Water Affairs and Sanitation that it had nothing to do with the conference in the first instance.

The now cancelled water conference was due to take place later this month, on the 26th of February, but drew much criticism because of its intended inclusion of the Israeli Ambassador as a speaker.

One high profile speaker, Professor Lorenzo Fioramonti, withdrew even before the event was cancelled (click here to read his letter). Fioramonti, a political economist at the University of Pretoria and director of the Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, explained that he withdrew due to the high attendance fee and because "there is an international academic boycott against Israel's public officials, which is supported by progressive groups both in Israel and Palestine and has a lot of support in South Africa too. This boycott is key to help the cause for sustainable and equitable peace in the Middle East, highlighting how behind the facade of technological solutions lies a systematic exploitation of Palestinian communities."

The Israeli regime in recent years has been attempting to break its growing isolation by promoting its water technology. However, water experts have pointed out the Israeli facade. In the words of Fioramonti: "There is enough evidence to show how Israel's policies have taken water away from Palestinian communities. Hiding this through a pseudo-technical debate about water technology would be unacceptable ... [W]e cannot ignore that, regardless of the specific technology the Israeli government has embraced, it is based on an unequal and often oppressive policy. As columnists in The Daily Maverick have pointed out, Israel's alleged success in water management is a 'constructed fantasy'."

We commend Professor Fioramonti for his principled stance. Water and water management is far too important for cheap Israeli gimmicks to advance its own oppressive agenda. We also welcome that the rug has been pulled from the Israeli Ambassador who will not be able to exploit our very serious water crises for his own cheap publicity and whitewashing of his regime.

A 2009 Amnesty International report, entitled "Troubled Waters—Thirsting for Justice" details Israel's discriminatory water policies. In 2010, the UN Human Rights Committee found Israel guilty of directly violating Palestinian human rights to water and sanitation. It is ironic that Israel tries to sell its water technology in South Africa, yet at the same time it denies Palestinians access to their own water.

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