

UK parliament introduces bill prohibiting boycott of Israeli goods

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London, June 20 (RHC)-- Britain's parliament is considering a government bill that would bar local councils from boycotting Israeli goods, drawing outrage from civil society organizations. The bill would

prevent local councils and universities from “adopting their own foreign policy” by boycotting Israel or companies that trade with Tel Aviv.

UK Communities Secretary Michael Gove was set to propose the legislation on Monday evening, The Telegraph reported. Gove told the paper> “It is simply wrong that public bodies have been wasting taxpayers’ time and money pursuing their own foreign policy agenda.” “The UK must have a consistent approach to foreign policy, set by the UK government,” he said.

Gove accused anti-Israel campaigns of undermining the UK’s foreign policy. The legislation would enable ministers to conduct investigations into suspected breaches of the ban. Public bodies that break the new rules could face “significant” fines, the paper said.

Observers believe the legislation would be a direct assault on the Palestinian civil society movement Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS).

Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said boycott, divestment and sanctions will be “essential to ending apartheid” by the Israeli regime, just as they helped end apartheid in South Africa.

"Boycott, divestment and sanctions helped end apartheid in South Africa. They will be essential to ending the apartheid regime in Israel, too." And Jeremy Corbyn continued> “I will firmly oppose the government’s anti-BDS bill — a disgraceful attack on our freedom to fight for human rights, justice and peace.” Corbyn sits in the House of Commons as an independent.

Over 60 civil society organizations, including Greenpeace UK and Liberty, have warned in a letter that the bill represents an attack on freedom of expression. “If passed, this law will stifle a wide range of campaigns concerned with the arms trade, climate justice, human rights, international law, and international solidarity with oppressed peoples struggling for justice,” they said.

Ben Jamal, the director of the London-based Palestine Solidarity Campaign, has already said that with support growing around the world for the BDS, the UK government “seems determined to shield Israel, and companies involved in its occupation, from accountability for its violations of human rights and international law.”

And Ruth Ehrlich, head of policy and campaigns at Liberty, said “the proposed anti-boycott bill, once again, shows their [UK government] flimsy commitment to protecting freedom of expression.” Ehrlich said by considering the bill the government is in fact attempting “to curb our rights to protest and for people to stand up for what they believe in.”

“This bill sets an extremely dangerous precedent, and its potential impact is harmful and wide-ranging. We urge the government to rethink its plans.”

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