

# Pakistan: solidarity campaign with Palestinian people launched

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**A campaign of solidarity with the Palestinian people was launched in Lahore earlier this year which is now gathering momentum.**

Campaign founders, including Amanullah Kariaper, Qalandar Memon, and Dr Magid Shihade, a Palestinian scholar teaching at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), discussed the initiative “Pakistanis for Palestine” at the Lahore Press Club.

The campaign’s first step has been to call on Pakistani academics and cultural workers — artists, writers, poets, and film makers — to join the growing boycott, disinvestment and sanctions movement against Israel that has been spreading around the world.

The campaign is focusing initially on asking Pakistanis to endorse the boycott of Israeli academic and cultural institutions, as called for by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI).

Kariaper, a local activist, said, “This is the first anniversary of Israel’s war on Gaza. We oppose any kind of normalization of relations between Pakistan and Israel, including normalization of Israeli discourse about terrorism that mask the realities of occupation and denial of human rights.”

Dr Shihade said, “We wish to send a message to the Palestinian people, who suffer daily dispossession and denial of their rights to sovereignty, that Pakistani people of conscience support them in their struggle for justice and equality as men and women, children and youth, workers and the working poor. We are aware that Israel is aided by the economic and military might of the US, and we oppose their imperialist aggressions that are devastating the region. We also view this campaign as part of ongoing struggles in Pakistan to oppose displacement, discrimination, and inequality.”

The Palestinian movement for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (representing the overwhelming majority among Palestinian civil society parties, labour unions, networks and organizations) emphasises fundamental Palestinian rights, sanctioned by international law and universal human rights principles, that ought to be respected by Israel to end the boycott.

The PACBI calls for a non-violent campaign of boycott of Israeli institutions, inspired by the movement to end apartheid in South Africa, until Israel ends its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantles the Wall; recognizes the fundamental rights of the Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and respects the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties.

The boycott is important in Pakistan because, according to Khalid Mahmood, director of the Labour Education Foundation and founding member of the campaign, it is important to re-energize ethical political engagement in Pakistan and the region and for Pakistanis to join initiatives in other nations

that have already taken steps to show concrete solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Qalandar Memon, who teaches at FC College and is the co-editor of the journal Naked Punch Asia, said it was an effort to revive a politics of Third World solidarity in Pakistan and to call on progressives and people of conscience to oppose US imperialist policies.

Kariapper said even in Pakistan there has been increasing circulation of spokespersons and academics advocating Israeli positions and media articles valorising Israeli policies of “counter-terrorism.”

Interview with Dr Magid Shihade, Scholar of Middle East Studies and Professor, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, LUMS:

Why do you think this campaign is important in Pakistan at this moment?

There are many reasons: most immediately, the first anniversary of the invasion of Gaza and in response to the call of PACBI to boycott and divest from Israel, I think that as an academic teaching in Pakistan that this is a very good time to launch a campaign that will show solidarity of Pakistanis for the Palestinian people. Also, the campaign will be a challenge to the normalization of Israeli discourse in the Pakistani media, and among academics and NGOs here that is very troubling.

The timing is even more important at this time in Pakistani history where ethical political engagement is required on a local, regional, and global level. We have seen Israeli products in Pakistani stores, which is abhorrent, given the rhetoric of support of Palestine that you see in the country.

What have been your impressions of the ways in which the Palestinian issue is expressed here, based on your experiences in Lahore?

It has been refreshing to see how common people in Lahore, people of all backgrounds, convey their support of the Palestinian people and admiration of the Palestinian struggle. But what we don't see is concrete steps to materialize that solidarity which is similar to the politics on the ground on Pakistani issues as well.

What is the need for a boycott campaign, however, in a state that officially does not have relations with Israel?

While officially there are no relations with Israel, there are documented talks of meetings between Pakistani and Israeli officials. More important for us, since it is a question of civil society, we are not just concerned with the official line of governments, we are also concerned with the Pakistani people.

**By Madiha Luqman**

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**P.S.**

\* From Daily Times:

[http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C05%5C24%5Cstory\\_24-5-2010\\_pg7\\_31](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010%5C05%5C24%5Cstory_24-5-2010_pg7_31)