



Around Europe

Quaker Council for European Affairs

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Denmark to Change its Labelling Rules for West Bank Settlement Products

The Danish government announced that it will allow retailers to differentiate between Palestinian products and settlement products made in the West Bank, in a policy shift lobbied for by NGOs at national and European level, including by QCEA in Brussels.

Denmark follows in the UK's footsteps as the second European country to introduce these voluntary labelling guidelines after the UK took this step in December 2009.

NGOs and campaigners argue that the "Made in Israel" label for settlement goods is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, settlement products risk being given preferential access to the EU market with this label and although current rules state that settlement goods are to be taxed at a higher rate, there is solid evidence to prove they sometimes enter the market at the lower rates. Secondly, EU consumer protection legislation requires that the consumer is not misled as to product's place of origin, which is clearly the case when products made in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are labelled as from Israel. Thirdly, by allowing settlement products to enter the EU marked as "Made in Israel," Europe is tacitly legitimising Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and resources.

"This is a step that clearly shows consumers that the products are produced under conditions that not only the Danish government but also European governments do not approve of," Foreign Minister Villy Søvndal told the Danish national newspaper Politiken. "It will then be up to consumers whether they choose to buy the products or not."

As the country holding the presidency of the Council of the EU for the first half of 2012, Denmark's symbolic move has gained added exposure in the media and in European circles. Although the Danish

presidency is due to end at the end of June, the momentum for a policy shift on settlement products is growing. Irish Tánaiste (Deputy Head of Government) Eamon Gilmore recently made it known that Ireland is considering pushing for a ban on the import of settlement products into the EU.

The Danish decision followed a few weeks after an announcement by Israel that it would formalise the status of the three settlement outposts of Bruchin, Sansana and Rechelim in the West Bank, in a move that was strongly criticised by European governments.

Outside of Europe, South Africa announced that it is to ban the labelling of settlement products as "Israeli" with Dr Rob Davies, the South African Minister of Trade and Industry, stating that consumers "should not be misled into believing that products originating from the OPT are products originating from Israel." South Africa's support to this cause is significant and symbolic due to the role that BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) played in bringing down its apartheid regime.

Although many people are wary of BDS as an effective or desirable tactic in dealing with Israel's violations of international law and settlement expansion, recent months have seen strong advocacy for a targeted boycott of settlement products. This perspective has come from a range of voices including from the Jewish community with political commentator Peter Beinart in the US arguing that the targeted boycott of settlement goods promotes the interests of Israel by rejecting the illegally occupied settlements but at the same time emphasising the legitimacy of Israel within its internationally recognised 1967 borders. The argument goes that correct product labelling along the lines of the UK, Danish and South African positions will allow consumers to reject Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory whilst supporting Israel.

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In fact, the argument for labelling West Bank products correctly goes beyond BDS. It is about governments refusing to accept the position that settlements are part of Israel. The international community has unanimously rejected the annexation of Palestinian land beyond the 1967 Green Line and we must not undermine this position by allowing the settlements to trade under the name of Israel.

QCEA welcomes Denmark's decision to allow voluntary differentiation of labelling for products originating in the West Bank in its supermarkets. These new rules empower consumers and send a message to Israel that Denmark does not accept that settlements, which are illegally occupied in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention, are on Israeli land. QCEA continues to advocate on the issue of Israeli settlement products entering the EU market.

Hannah Slater

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“All Change!” at the Quaker Council for European Affairs

After a decade of representing Quakers in Brussels, Liz Scurfield and Martina Weitsch are handing over the reins. Over the past 33 years, successive Representatives have acted as the voice of Quakers at European institutions. After ten years of hard work in Brussels, Liz and Martina are the longest serving Representatives in the history of QCEA. However, from October 2012, the Quaker voice in Brussels will have two new faces.

Alexandra "Sasha" Bosbeer, a Friend of 20 years' standing says: 'This opportunity to promote Quaker values is very exciting, and I am very much looking forward to two-way communication with other European Quakers on issues of importance to us.'

Internationalism has always been a part of Alexandra's life, starting with a childhood spent in three countries with a mixed-nationality family and later working in a wide range of countries. She has recently been blogging about her experiences in Central America and thoughts regarding social injustice from a Quakerly point of view. She was also lately involved in witnessing and supporting the Occupy movement in Portland, Oregon, together with local Quakers. Alexandra's previous experience includes managing part of the international accreditation programme for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and fifteen years in Ireland teaching environmental and social forest management. In addition to photography and blogging, she is a keen potter.



Alexandra "Sasha" Bosbeer

Gordon Matthews, a birthright Friend, and a former Senior Volunteer at QCEA is 'passionately committed to working for justice, peace and environmental sustainability, and especially looking forward to engaging in advocacy on behalf of Quakers at the European level.'



Gordon Matthews

Gordon Matthews has been the warden of the Quaker Meeting House in Evesham since 2004. From 2007 to 2011 he served as a town councillor. Gordon attended Sidcot Friends School and studied environmental science at the University of Bradford. He lived at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre whilst training to be a teacher. He has worked for most of his adult life either for Quaker bodies or for ecumenical peace organisations. He has served with the Quaker Peace

Action Caravan (January - March 1981), the Fellowship of Reconciliation in England (1981-1986), Charney Manor (1987-1990), Church & Peace (1990-1997), and Quaker-Hilfe (1998-2001).

Liz and Martina, looking back over these last 10 exhilarating years in which they have been privileged to serve Friends as their voice in Europe, reflect on their contributions to policy development, and to the growth and prospering of a number of NGO networks inspired and co-founded by QCEA. Martina and Liz are delighted to leave the solid foundations they have built with such capable successors to take the work forward in new directions. Liz comments, 'We are handing over an organisation that is well known to and well respected by decision-makers and NGO colleagues alike.' Martina adds, 'A decade of continuous management has put QCEA on solid ground with a heightened profile among European Quakers and others.' Liz and Martina are also proud to leave a beautifully renovated Quaker House Brussels. This resource acts as a central meeting point for many groups and organisations as well as the physical presence of Friends in Belgium.

For further information or additional comment, please contact: Richard Condon, Clerk of QCEA (richardcondon@clearwire.be)

From 1 October 2012, Alexandra and Gordon can be contacted at QCEA. Their respective e-mail addresses will be abosbeer@qcea.org and gmatthews@qcea.org

In the Time of your Life, Live, Love and Lobby(!)

I am regularly asked - indeed, demanded - to say how I think we should be leading sustainable lives. The logic being, not everyone is a trained scientist, nor are they fortunate enough, as I am, to work on sustainability issues full-time. My stock response is, "lobby your politicians", followed closely by, "how do the lifestyles you take for granted look in light of the command to love?"

Perhaps expecting - indeed, hoping - I would say renewable energies and recycling, an awkward silence typically ensues. Despite widespread awareness of sustainability issues, people do not experience themselves as having real alternatives, and typically do superficially little.

At QCEA, we staunchly believe the public have been underestimated to deliver on sustainable policies. But the public should not be fooled into thinking that consumer choice can make our economies green. As the BBC's "Ethical Man" and his family found out to

their chagrin (having got rid of the car, insulated their home, replaced all their light bulbs, stopped flying, turned down the thermostat, changed the way they ate, and their profligate patterns of waste), they were only to manage to cut their total emissions by just 22 per cent. Such a formidable personal response, even if emulated by every soul on the planet, is simply inadequate when the minimum greenhouse gas emissions reduction is of the order 90+ per cent (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050.

The significant barriers to sustainability remain cultural, institutional and systemic. Hence the need to lobby governments, at every level, from the local to the supranational. Not only to ensure that the right set of standards and regulations are put in place to edit out unsustainable alternatives before they reach consumers, but more importantly, as they concern the wider political ambition based on just and sustainable relationships, and reverence for the ecosystems to which we are an part.

A problem well stated is a problem half solved

Frankly, most people are not even remotely aware the extent to which paradigmatic change needs to happen just to make our world a pleasant place to live in. Any vision of sustainable development must recognise that eradicating poverty and social injustice is inextricably linked to ecological stability and renewal. Unfortunately, the principal narrative as it relates to sustainable development is as an economic issue with silver bullet, technological fixes.

While none of us yet has a complete and convincing account of how humanity can get out of this mess, a mixture of binding targets (to indicate the size of the future market), incentive frameworks (to overcome market inertia) and regulation (to maintain momentum over the longer term) will be critical. Steps such as setting tighter rules on car emissions, financing energy efficiency in buildings and implementing the Smart Cities and Communities framework are already having an impact that can be measured. But taken as a whole, European policy is still too weak to respond effectively to our sustainability challenges. Only by deploying its cooperative strength will Europe have the power to

help shape events and successfully meet our sustainability challenges. And it is our responsibility to ensure they have sufficient political will to do so via our interest representation and personal lobbying.

Perfect Love casts out fear

I also encourage people to consider what wouldn't they do for the sake of love? At a time when we're absolutely desperate for radical, wilful transformation, it's useful to remember: what is the reason for living life, other than to love it? If you actually take the time to reflect upon how the lifestyles we take for granted look in light of the command to love, it's not difficult to recognise love as a potential game-changer.

Not to be confused with extreme positive thinking or fey sentiment, love does not mean denying life's suffering and disappointment. But precisely because love deals with the deepest tangles and knots of our situation, and uniquely has the potential to free us from our limiting fears, it unleashes our most noble motivations and capacities. And by delighting in life, we experience greater fulfilment and are more likely to act responsibly, in our long-term interests.

Paul Parrish

APOLOGY AND CORRECTION:

In the last edition of Around Europe there was a misprint in the first article heading. It should have read: Israel Destroys EU Development Projects Worth €29 million. Our apologies.

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