

Commissioner Ashton and Commissioner Füle
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels

30 June 2011

Dear Commissioner Ashton and Commissioner Füle,

We are writing to you to express concern over the situation of civil society and human rights defenders in Israel. As you know, Israeli civil society – particularly, the segment which works to promote human rights in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories – has come under increasing pressure in recent years, including through an ongoing series of legislative proposals which seek to curtail their freedom of expression and association.

The most pressing of these proposals is the Prohibition on Boycott Bill, which has already passed its first reading and which was approved by the Knesset Constitution Committee on 27 June, ahead of a final reading and vote scheduled for 4 July.

We wish to express our support for a petition by 50 Israeli civil society organizations, objecting to this bill. The signatories include both supporters and opponents of boycott – all are united in recognizing that freedom of expression and association are at stake. Please find the petition attached.

If enacted, this bill will threaten freedom of expression and association by exposing Israeli organizations which “call for boycott” of Israel (including illegal settlements in the West Bank) to lawsuits, in which they could be made to pay penalties without the plaintiff having to prove any actual damage, and which could ruin them financially. A new clause also states that such organizations could also have their non-profit status revoked, therefore jeopardizing their ability to receive donor funds (including from the EU). A “call for boycott” could be widely interpreted – since it is not clear which activities may be punishable, this law could impact organizations publishing research on the economic aspects of settlements, for example.

We urge you to express concern over the bill’s potential impact on freedom of expression and association, particularly of human rights defenders. In line with the Parliament’s [resolution of 17 June 2010](#) on human rights defenders, we also encourage you meet with Israeli human rights defenders in any future visits to Israel, giving them visibility and support in a time when they are under pressure.

We look forward to hearing from you on this urgent matter at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

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Liz Lynne MEP (ALDE)

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