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Activists aim to block Israeli ships from US ports in solidarity with Palestinians

Grassroots coalition is working to block Zim operated ships from docking and unloading cargo in Oakland, New York and Seattle



In 2014, Aroc successfully prevented a ship from transferring its cargo to US soil (Aroc)

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✘ Palestinian rights activists are aiming to block ships operated by an Israeli shipping line from unloading cargo in key US port cities as part of a campaign to pressure Israel over its numerous violations of international law.

The Arab Resource and Organizing Center (Aroc), which is leading the effort, told Middle East Eye on Wednesday that its "Block the Boat" campaign had successfully prevented a ship operated by Zim Integrated Shipping Services Ltd from docking in Oakland, California.

Zim, considered the 10th largest (<https://alphaliner.axsmarine.com/PublicTop100/>) shipping company in the world, told MEE in an email that delays at the port prevented it from unloading cargo there, but did not mention the cause.

'Our goal is to impact apartheid Israel politically and economically by disrupting international commerce from the Zim shipping line'

- Lara Kiswani, Aroc

"Due to operational constraints and long delays in the port of Oakland, and in order to meet schedule departures in the Far East, we will be calling on other US West Coast Ports until further notice," the company said.

Wassim Hage, press officer for Aroc, said the Zim-operated ship had been scheduled to dock in the port, but there were around 5,000 people ready to mobilise and picket if it attempted to do so.

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"For the past 12-13 days, [the ship] has been sort of meandering in circles, outside of the Port of Oakland, behaving in a way that no other ship really is behaving," Hage told MEE.

"We believe that this is because they are afraid to dock in fear of our protests."

Aroc told MEE that similar actions were being organised against other Zim-operated ships in Seattle, Los Angeles, New York and the Canadian city of Vancouver.

"Our goal is to impact apartheid Israel politically and economically by disrupting international commerce from the Zim shipping line," said Lara Kiswani, Aroc's executive director.

'Fighting for justice'

Aroc's campaign comes in response to Israel's latest offensive on the besieged Gaza Strip, where Israeli air strikes killed at least 248 Palestinians, including more than 60 children.

Kiswani noted that the ongoing campaign was in direct response to a call from the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), which urged the global trade union movement to support Palestinians and also express support for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

BDS is a non-violent movement that is modelled after a similar effort that targeted South Africa under apartheid which encourages the censure of Israel's violations of international law and human rights standards through boycotts.

"This is a BDS campaign and the goal of BDS is to isolate Israel politically, economically and culturally. And in this particular campaign, we believe it has a quite significant political and economic impact on apartheid Israel," Kiswani said.



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Last month, South African dockworkers also heeded the call of the Palestinian trade union federation and refused to offload cargo from another Zim-operated ship.

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A similar action was taken days prior by dockworkers in the Italian city of Livorno, who refused to load an arms shipment to a ship operated by the company.

The call to stop Zim comes as a rising number of labour unions in the US have begun endorsing statements in solidarity with the Palestinians.

Some of these organisations have even adopted the call to boycott Israel over its violations of human rights and international law.

The northern California chapter of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), a union representing dockworkers across the west coast of the US, issued a statement last week in support of Palestinian rights.

"The ILWU Northern California District Council stands in solidarity with the Palestine and Palestinian communities across the world who are fighting for justice," the statement read.

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