**The UN should be ashamed of its anti-Israel boycott list**

By: Stephen Daisley

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I knew if we waited long enough, the United Nations would make itself useful. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has produced a handy catalogue of companies that supporters of Israel can give their business to. Of course, this was not Michelle Bachelet’s intention. Bachelet is the commissioner and before that she was an exquisitely unpopular Chilean politician and head of UN Women, the all-girl Ghostbusters of UN agencies that fights global mistreatment of women by putting out hashtags and putting Saudi Arabia on its executive board.

Now Bachelet has released ‘a database of all business enterprises involved in certain specified activities related to the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory’. She does not mean to celebrate their commitment to serving customers and clients in sometimes dangerous environments. No, her roster was compiled at the request of the UN Human Rights Council. This is a body in which countries whose idea of human rights is gender-neutral torture and equal-opportunity ballot-rigging get together and pass reams of vexatious resolutions against Israel.

Bachelet’s list doesn’t explicitly encourage the blackballing of companies mentioned. But it is a nod and a wink to the methods of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement. It’s too obvious to be clever but it’s still sly: a coycott, rather than a boycott.

BDS’s economic warfare against the Jewish state has had little success but that’s not the point: a UN body is tacitly legitimising its agenda and even doing the research for it. The UN’s obsession with this tiny strip of land on the shores of the Mediterranean has nothing to do with human rights. If Vlad the Impaler were around today he’d be a special rapporteur on exsanguination and no one in Geneva would see anything untoward about it. What OHCHR’s list is about is the UN’s institutional hostility towards Israel and support for ‘de-judaising’ Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria.

Jerusalem is Israel’s capital; before that it was the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Judah (Israel 1.0). However hard the UN strives to erase the Jewish character of the city, its historical record isn’t going anywhere. Judea and Samaria are what Turtle Bay calls ‘the Occupied Palestinian Territories’, though when Israel captured them in 1967, they did so not from any state called Palestine (no such state has ever existed), but from Jordan. Jordan, in turn, had captured them in 1948, during the Israeli War of Independence (and renamed them ‘the West Bank’ in the process). Jordan’s annexation was almost universally unrecognised — it was…what’s the phrase…an illegal occupation…and prior to this these lands had been part of Mandatory Palestine. Mandatory Palestine was created by the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine to ‘secure the establishment of the Jewish national home’. The Israelis have innovations – agrarian, medical and technological – to their name but perhaps their greatest feat is being the first nation-state in history to illegally occupy their own territory.

Israel has rightly interpreted OHCHR’s list as an act of incitement. Netanyahu’s government, as is its fashion, has responded with lots of noise but little action. Foreign minister Israel Katz ordered the suspension of ties with the OHCHR, something he called an ‘exceptional and harsh measure’, though the Times of Israel reports that this essentially means ‘any requests they may have will not be answered’. Getting the brush-off from a surly Jerusalem bureaucrat is what the Israeli government calls a sanction and what Israeli citizens call ‘Monday’.

Israel can take care of itself. The people the UN harms when it works to isolate and delegitimise Israel are the Palestinians, and not just the 36,000 who work on the settlements. It rewards and reinforces the rejectionist mindset that has kept them stateless and will go on keeping them stateless. It tells them that their long, painful campaign of national self-harm is just and holds out false hope that it will one day triumph. It won’t. Israel is here to stay and the priority of anyone who professes to be pro-Palestinian should be convincing the Palestinians to recognise that fact and, on that basis, finally accept offers of peace and statehood. If you care about Palestinian human rights, your efforts should be directed towards creating a Palestinian economy, in which the companies listed by the OHCHR want to invest.

Until then, put Michelle Bachelet’s list to good use. Buy from, sell to and invest in the very companies she has singled out: from Hadiklaim Date Growers’ Cooperative and Booking.com, to Motorola Solutions and Angel Bakeries. I appreciate some of you will have misgivings about getting mixed up with dangerous sorts like date-growers and pastry chefs, but trust me: it’s all for a good cause. Israelis have rights too and their businesses and economy should not be threatened by a UN body moonlighting for bigoted boycotters.

Be in no doubt: if the OHCHR gets away with this, Israel won’t be the last country to find its economy targeted in this way. The policies of any member-state will be open to this kind of political interference. The states that want to avert this eventuality should demand Bachelet goes and reduce its contributions until she does.