

Belgian officials boycott trade delegation to Israel



Brussels, December 2 (RHC)-- Representatives of two local governments in Belgium have pulled out of a trade delegation to Israel in a move seen as a major victory for proponents of the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

Pascal Smet, the foreign trade secretary of the government of the Brussels region, announced the decision on Thursday, according to the French-language public-service broadcasting organization RTBF.

Elio Di Rupo, the prime minister of the Belgian state of Wallonia and a former prime minister of the kingdom of Belgium, pulled out of the delegation last week.

"The lack of progress in the peace process, the lack of progress on the ground and the violation by Israel of major elements of the Geneva Convention are prompting us to hold back on official cooperation," said Di Rupo.

The mission, which is scheduled to take place in December, will include business people and representatives of commercial enterprises from across Belgium. This is while Israel has stepped up its crackdown against those who support the BDS movement.

Israel has decided to bar two US congresswomen from visiting the occupied territories over their support for boycott of Tel Aviv.

The movement was initiated in 2005 by over 170 Palestinian organizations and later turned international. It is meant to initiate “various forms of boycott against Israel until it meets its obligations under international law” and end its occupation of Palestinian lands.

Last year, Israel published a list of 20 organizations whose activists would be barred from entering the occupied territories due to their support for boycott campaigns. Israel’s strategic affairs ministry has been allocated \$36 million to combat the BDS movement.

Thousands of volunteers worldwide have joined the BDS movement, which calls on people and groups across the world to cut economic, cultural and academic ties to Tel Aviv, to help promote the Palestinian cause.

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