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COMMUNITY GROUPS DENOUNCE 'BRAND ISRAEL' INAUGURATION

(TORONTO, August 26, 2008) – Yesterday over a hundred Torontonians showed up at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Center (MNJCC) to voice their opposition to the official launch of a 1-million dollar 'Brand Israel' rebranding campaign at that venue. Toronto has been selected as a 'test market' for a year-long public relations campaign launched by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to improve "Israel's image" – a state who's racism against Palestinians has come under increasing scrutiny by the growing worldwide boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement.

During the rally, organized by the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA), speakers from No One is Illegal (NOII), the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), The UofT Reparations Committee, the United Black Students at Ryerson (UBSR) and Women in Solidarity with Palestine (WISP, formerly the Jewish Women's Committee to end the Occupation) addressed the racist nature of the Israeli state and its rebranding campaign. CAIA spokesperson, Kole Kilibarda, noted that, "Just as Torontonians rejected attempts by the South African regime to rebrand apartheid in the 1980s, we will also refuse to 'buy into' this latest attempt to change the subject and divert attention away from Israel's state-sanctioned racism." Hussan of NOII reminded the crowd that, "The world increasingly rejects settler-colonialism, whether here on Turtle Island [North America] or in Israel. Just as apartheid fell in South Africa, it will fall in Turtle Island and Israel!"

In reference to the announced plans of 'Brand Israel' to bring an Israeli-Ethiopian performer to Canada in order to win-over the 'Muslim-Somali' community in Toronto, a spokesperson for the United Black Students at Ryerson, herself of Ethiopian-Jewish descent, outlined the racism that Ethiopians face in Israel and commented that: "we have our own tensions between the Ethiopian and Somali communities ever since the illegal US-backed Ethiopian occupation of Somalia, there are all kinds of amends to be made that will take a long of time healing and relationship building. For an external group of white people who know nothing about either of our communities to think they can appear from out of nowhere and build bridges between us is insulting...It demonstrates an embarrassing level of cultural ignorance and incompetence. If the Israel rebranding campaign continues with this level of incompetence its failure is inevitable."

The crowd kept up high spirits despite a concerted police presence, stepped up patrols by Condor Security personnel at the MNJCC and a small presence of pro-apartheid counter-demonstrators waving racist placards. To the chants of "Brick by Brick, Wall by Wall / Israeli apartheid is going to fall!" and "Our only course of action / Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions!" CAIA members leafleted in the rush hour traffic informing thousands of commuters about the 'Brand Israel' campaign launch and the need to oppose its various manifestations over the next year.

2008 marks the 60th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba, which laid the foundations for the current system of Israeli apartheid. To date the year has been filled with worldwide events marking the ethnic-cleansing of over 750,000 Palestinians and the destruction of over 430 Palestinian villages by Israeli militias in 1948. A number of important resolutions in support of BDS have been passed by labour and student unions this year, including a number in Canada. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs' attempts to use Toronto as a 'test market' for its rebranding campaign are seen as a testament to the strength of the growing BDS movement in this city. CAIA has vowed to continue pressing forward with this important campaign until the core demands of the Palestinian-initiated BDS movement are met, including: (1) the end of Israeli military occupation over all Arab lands; (2) the right of return of refugees as stipulate by UN Resolution 194 and (3) the granting of full equality to the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

For any further inquiries or interview requests contact CAIA media by phone at (647) 831-5516, by email at media@caiaweb.org or visit us at <http://www.caiaweb.org>. For more information on the rebranding campaign see the following article: <http://www.caiaweb.org/node/747>.