

COSATU CALLS FOR BOYCOTT OF ISRAEL (BUSINESS DAY ONLINE, 20070525)

Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) president Willy Madisha on Thursday called for the Government to cease all diplomatic relations with Israel after its attacks on the Palestinian leadership.

Mr Madisha said the best way to have Israel comply with United Nations resolutions on Palestine was to step up pressure by a global diplomatic boycott such as the one imposed on apartheid SA. The Cosatu leader was speaking at a media briefing of the coalition End The Occupation Campaign. The organisation was recently formed to co-ordinate a week of action that coincides with activities around the world to condemn the occupation by Israel of the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

Ali Halimeh, the Palestinian Ambassador to South Africa, said that more than 100 civilians had lost their lives during the attacks. He said Palestinian Higher Education Minister Nasser Al Din Al Shaer had been abducted from his house by Israeli soldiers, apparently in a bid to prevent him joining the week of activism in South Africa.

Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils, whose organisation Not In My Name is part of the coalition, said it was "disgraceful for a government that projects itself as democratic to behave this way". Asked whether the South African Government would publicly condemn Al Shaer's abduction, he said Pretoria would remain "very vocal" on Israel's abuse in the occupied territories. Minister Kasrils said preparations for the week of campaigning were going according to plan and that there were already indications that participation by various supporters of the Palestinian cause would reach "unseen" proportions. The campaign, he said, would include ecumenical communication in South Africa's mosques and churches. There would also be photographic exhibitions in Cape Town and Johannesburg, and a candlelight commemoration at the Israeli mission in Killarney. The campaign would also include handing out leaflets, picketing and an encouragement to boycott Israeli products sold in retail outlets, he said.