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Government to form Joint task force to counter U.K. boycotts

By Barak Ravid, Haaretz Correspondent

The foreign and education ministers are setting up a public relations task force to prepare a public relations campaign against the boycotts of Israel being forged in the United Kingdom.

The joint task force will consist of representatives of the two ministries, the Histadrut and heads of universities and colleges.

Anti-Israel boycotts are spreading in the U.K. from university teachers' unions to other professional associations.

Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said in a debate on the task force yesterday that "we're dealing with hypocrisy and hatred, which must not be allowed to emerge, even if they are marginal bodies. Whoever promotes such a boycott must understand that it has a price."

Foreign Ministry deputy director general for Europe Rafi Barak will head the task force, which has been instructed to recommend ways of dealing with the situation in Britain both politically and through public relations.

Emphasis will be placed on working through the Internet and cooperating with voluntary bodies such as the friendship associations, the Jewish community, churches, trade unions, etc.

The Histadrut will interact with the trade unions, the universities will interact with their equivalents and so on.

The team was also instructed to propose how to use the boycott threats to expand academic cooperation with Britain.

"We cannot afford not to do nothing. We have an obligation to prevent the process' expansion," Livnin said during the debate.

Education Minister Yuli Tamir said, "We must initiate a move that will render the boycott illegitimate in the eyes of the world. It is important that Israel make this unequivocally clear. The goal is to make the the British public reject the intention to boycott Israel."

Participants in the meeting included the chairman of the Histadrut labor federation, Ofer Eini, the heads of Israel's major universities and colleges, academic organizations, and student union leaders.