

What is the underlying principle of calls for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)?

It is no longer denied that Israel has oppressed the Palestinian people for decades in multiple forms: occupying, colonizing, ethnically cleansing, racially discriminating, in short, denying Palestinians the fundamental rights for freedom, equality and self-determination. Despite abundant condemnation of Israel's policies by the UN and all relevant international conventions, the international community of nations has failed to bring about Israel's compliance with international law or its respect for basic human rights. Israel's crimes have continued with utter impunity. The time has come for action, not just words. BDS are the most effective non-violent, morally consistent means for achieving justice and genuine peace in the region through concerted international pressure similar to that applied on South African apartheid.



From the website of the
Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and
Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)

<http://www.pacbi.org/faqs.htm>

What is the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel?

PACBI was launched in Ramallah in April 2004 by a group of Palestinian academics and intellectuals to join the growing international boycott movement. In July 2004, the Campaign issued a Call for Boycott addressed to the international community, urging it to comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions until Israel withdraws from all the lands occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem; removes all its colonies in those lands; agrees to United Nations resolutions relevant to the restitution of Palestinian refugees' rights; and dismantles its system of apartheid. This statement was met with widespread support, and has to date been endorsed by nearly sixty Palestinian academic, cultural and other civil society federations, unions, and organizations, including the Federation of Unions of Palestinian Universities' Professors and Employees and the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) in the West Bank

What is the Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)?

On July 9, 2005, one year after the historic Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which found Israel's Wall built on occupied Palestinian territory to be illegal, a clear majority of Palestinian civil society called upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel, similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era, until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with international law. BDS has been endorsed by over 170 Palestinian parties, organizations, trade unions and movements representing the Palestinian people in the 1967 and 1948 territories and in the diaspora. On July 13, 2005 the UN International Civil Society Conference adopted the Palestinian Call for BDS.

Does Academic Boycott Infringe on Academic Freedom?

It may; but who's Academic Freedom is being referred to within this context? That of Israeli academics. Are we to regard only the academic freedom of Israelis as worthy? Plus, the privileging of academic freedom as a super-value above all other freedoms is in principle antithetical to the very foundation of human rights. The fact that Palestinians are denied basic rights as well as academic freedom under Israel's military occupation is ignored. The fact that, with the exception of a tiny yet crucial minority, Israeli academics are largely supportive of their state's oppression or are acquiescently silent about it is ignored. The fact that Israeli academic institutions have been and continue to be entirely complicit in the continuing aggressions against Palestinian society is ignored. The fact that Israeli academic institutions are themselves directly engaged in violations of Palestinian human rights and international law is ignored.

BDS is opposed by many Israelis who support the Palestinian struggle. By calling for BDS, aren't we alienating these Israeli supporters?

Although the views of Israeli supporters regarding methods of struggle should be taken into consideration, Palestinians have the ultimate right to decide on the best method for attaining freedom from an illegal occupation and systematically oppressive regime. Supporters of the Palestinian struggle within the international community and within Israel itself have to stop attempting to dictate the terms of the struggle but support the Palestinian right to resist an illegal occupation, especially when the form of resistance is non-violent, as is the case with calls for BDS. BDS are morally sound and effective means of struggle that challenge the world to force Israeli compliance with international law; they therefore serve the cause of ending oppression and establishing a just and sustainable peace. That should be the most urgent consideration for morally consistent individuals supporting genuine peace.

Won't BDS also hurt those Israelis who support the Palestinian struggle?

Israelis who oppose the occupation should be doing so on moral grounds and must be willing to accept that there is a price to pay to end the colonial oppression being perpetrated in their names and perpetuated through the complicity of most of their society.

Rather than focusing on the possibility that some morally consistent, non-Zionist members of the Israeli left may be inadvertently affected by boycott, one must emphasize the impact boycott might have on the overall establishment in Israel. The price that some conscientious Israelis may pay as an unavoidable byproduct of the boycott is quite modest when compared to the price Palestinians have to pay for the lack of boycotts or any similarly effective pressures on Israel.

Challenging the fanatic, militaristic Israeli establishment may indeed strengthen its grip on power in the short run -- extreme populism and the rise of fascist tendencies in Israel attest to that; but in the longer run it will weaken that establishment, just as in South Africa. Repression under apartheid did not die down in a smooth downwards spiral, after all. This will serve not only the Palestinians, but also, in the longer term, the true left in Israel.

Aren't BDS tactics unpopular in the international community?

Recent breakthroughs in the positions of the US Presbyterian church, the Anglican church and some mainstream, progressive Jewish-American organizations -- not to mention the fast spreading boycott movement in Europe and calls for divestment in the United States -- indicate that there is an encouragingly growing acceptance in the west of the need to effectively pressure Israel to end injustice.

Those who do oppose boycott of Israel were generally in favor of the comprehensive, blanket boycotts (in all fields, including academia) of the apartheid regime in South Africa. To oppose one and support the other entails that either they are hypocritical or else they have good reasons to believe that such pressure measures cannot be as effective in the Israeli case as in its South African predecessor. We have yet to read or hear one good argument supporting this unfounded belief. Treating Israel as a state outside of history, unaccountable to international law and morally untouchable is simply wrong. It reflects not only moral inconsistency but political blindness as well, as it serves to perpetuate Israel's rarely matched oppression of the people of Palestine.

Can BDS really be effective in ending Israeli occupation and oppression?

History shows us that boycotts and sanctions can be effective. In December 1989, a recommendation by the European Parliament to freeze funds allocated to scientific cooperation with Israel until it reopened the Palestinian universities prompted the Israeli government to announce the gradual reopening of colleges and vocational training centers in the occupied territories in February 1990. In effect, on the rare occasions when Israel did at all contemplate changing its racist oppressive policies, it was mainly attributed to facing concerted pressures by the international community.

But of course, the most obvious example of the effectiveness of BDS campaigns is South Africa. After calling for boycott and sanctions against Israel in 2002, the South African Minister for Intelligence Services, Ronnie Kasrils, stated: "we in South Africa know about racial oppression. We fought it and defeated it because it was unjust... South Africa is an example of what is possible."

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