

Myth Busting on BDS



“BDS is anti-Semitic”

WRONG!

BDS targets the Israeli state because of its serious violations of international law and human rights. It does not target organisations simply because they are Israeli and has no bearing on whether they are Jewish. In fact, Israel’s claim to carry out its brutal policies in the name of all Jewish people has been refuted by many Jewish groups and individuals who also oppose the actions of the state. In July 2018, 40 Jewish groups from 15 countries signed a letter coming out against equating BDS with antisemitism¹.

The BDS movement is in fact an anti-racist initiative started by Palestinian civil society, modelling itself on the Anti-Apartheid Movement that helped to bring liberation for Black South Africans. It is rooted in an internationalist call to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people who are dispossessed, living under brutal Israeli occupation and have been denied human rights and self-determination. To suggest that a call from 170 Palestinian civil society groups for support as part of a non-violent movement is racist and anti-Semitic is not only incorrect but an insult to millions of Palestinians who support this movement and are fighting for their freedom.

“BDS unfairly singles out Israel”

WRONG!

The BDS Movement is a Palestinian-led campaign, with the specific aim of ending violations of international law affecting Palestinian rights. Therefore, the movement calls for a boycott of companies, academic institutions and cultural bodies actively complicit in this². These guidelines are outlined and clearly defined on the BDS website with specific reference to the criteria under which an organisation or body would become eligible for boycotting or not.³

However, this argument is based upon an illogical premise. Single issue campaigns and initiatives by their very definition ‘single out’ the specific grievances and cases concerned in order to draw attention to their cause. Therefore, the BDS call no more ‘singles out’ Israel for its crimes against the Palestinian people than, for example, campaigns against fossil fuels, the Ivory Trade or the death penalty ‘single out’ states, companies and corporations who hurt the environment, partake in the Ivory Trade or carry out the death penalty.

Therefore, it is nothing more than a deflection away from Israel’s brutal treatment of Palestinian men, women and children under its military occupation. This accusation is, however, very revealing for the double standard that it shows towards Palestinians. Those who make it would never berate Kurdish solidarity movements or Syrian refugees nor would they accuse Iranian, Russian or Tibetan human rights activists of ‘unfairly singling out’ Turkey, the Assad Regime and the Syrian state, Iran, Russia or China in their struggle for human rights and dignity. Nor would they demand justifications from the oppressed groups concerned over any non-violent tactics they use against these regimes denying them freedom. What this accusation reveals is that those who make it believe Palestinians to be uniquely undeserving and unlike any other people on Earth. Those who allege this are actually showing that they do not believe that Palestinians are entitled to shape their own movement and determine their own struggle.

It is the Israeli state which has in fact singled out Palestinians by denying them rights, the ability to live in their own homes and on their own lands, self-determination and the ability to live a normal life. It is **Israel and its supporters** who have singled out Palestinians, not the Palestinian-led BDS Movement who have unfairly singled out Israel.

¹ <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/first-ever-40-jewish-groups-worldwide-oppose-equating-antisemitism-with-criticism-of-israel/>
First-ever: 40+ Jewish groups worldwide oppose equating antisemitism with criticism of Israel, Jewish Voice for Peace, 17th July 2018, retrieved on 13th February 2020.

² <https://bdsmovement.net/get-involved/what-to-boycott>

³ <https://bdsmovement.net/faqs#collapse16244>

“But isn’t BDS unhelpful for peace?”

WRONG!

The BDS Movement was created after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Israel’s ‘Separation Wall’ (referred to by Palestinians as the ‘Apartheid Wall’) and all of the Jewish settlements built on the territories captured after the 1967 War were illegal⁴. However, Israel refused to dismantle the wall or end the occupation and successive Israeli governments have made clear that they will not withdraw from the territories unless forced to do so. Lori Allen has observed that “A quarter of a century after the first Palestinian human rights organisation was established, the Israeli occupation is only more entrenched”⁵ and how “countless human rights reports documenting Israeli abuses” as well as “repeated efforts at political negotiations and grassroots level “dialogue”, have done nothing to thwart Israeli settler colonialism’s spread”.⁶ Ingrid Jaradat, one of the co-founders of BDS has argued that if action had been taken to enforce international law against Israel “there wouldn’t have been a BDS call”⁷ in the first place.

Therefore, the BDS movement is a call for people of consciousness all over the world to apply economic and political pressure, to hold Israel to account. In fact, BDS has helped empower Palestinian communities and their supporters by articulating a vision for human rights for all people in Israel/Palestine. The message it sends is one of recognition that human rights abuses, illegal and violent colonial occupations and the destruction of a people will not be tolerated in the 21st century and has a cost to it. BDS therefore, is both a rational and moral initiative given the intransigence of the Israeli state and its inability to respect human rights or end their occupation of Palestinian lands.

“But the BDS Movement is divisive”

WRONG!

The BDS Movement has three specific demands of Israel:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

These demands are in line with international law (multiple UN Resolutions and Human Rights organisations)⁸ and are based on granting equality and human rights to all people in the land and a future for all to live in peace and equality. It is a tactic not a solution but even so BDS has been adopted and endorsed by numerous activists, writers and artists from around the world including Naomi Klein, Angela Davis, Arundhati Roy and Roger Waters. It has also been adopted by groups and organisations committed to social justice, including veterans of the Anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa such as Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu and former South African Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils. In the UK, the National Union of Students and the Trade Union Congress have adopted BDS while in the US, Democratic Socialists of America and Black Lives Matter have all adopted the BDS call and pledged their support to the Palestinian people.

Many progressive Jewish organisations such as Jewish Voice for Peace have also supported BDS as a principle to advocate Palestinian demands for freedom and basic dignity. These acts of solidarity demonstrate that despite attempts by Israel’s supporters and apologists for its crimes to conflate BDS with anti-Semitism, it is widely recognised as a movement to champion Palestinian rights and as a means of common struggle for justice.

⁴ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2004/icj616.doc.htm>

⁵ Allen L. *What’s in a link? Transnational Solidarities Across Palestine and their Intersectional Possibilities* (2018), South Atlantic Quarterly, (117) 1. p. 9.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 9-10.

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/14/bds-boycott-divestment-sanctions-movement-transformed-israeli-palestinian-debate>, Thrall N. *BDS: how a controversial non-violent movement has transformed the Israeli-Palestinian debate*, The Guardian, 14th August 2018, retrieved on 13th February 2020.

⁸ UN Resolution 194 calls for the repatriation and or compensation of Palestinian refugees. 242, 338 and 2334 call for an end to the Israeli occupation over land captured in 1967 as a formula for resolving the conflict, while Israel’s largest human rights organisation B’tselem has called for an end to the occupation: https://www.btselem.org/duty_to_end_occupation.