

The predominant drive of the “boycott, divestment, and sanctions” (BDS) campaign and its leadership is not criticism of Israeli policies, but the demonization and delegitimization of Israel.

Since 2001, organized campaigns around the world have promoted the “boycott, divestment, and sanctions” of Israel. The campaign was endorsed by pro-Palestinian organizations in Europe and the United States and the call for BDS against Israel has since become a key tactic within the global effort to delegitimize and isolate Israel. Campaigns have been launched demanding the “divestment” of university, municipal, church, union, and other investment portfolios from companies that advocates claim “aid Israel’s occupation,” as well as the “boycott” of Israeli products, professionals, professional associations and academic institutions, and artistic performances (in Israel and abroad).

BDS does nothing to promote Israeli-Palestinian negotiations or reconciliation, and does not even support this as a goal of the movement. Indeed, leading BDS advocates and organizations do not support a two-state solution or the continued existence of Israel as a Jewish state and deny the Jewish right to self-determination and statehood. The global BDS

movement’s demand for the return of all Palestinian refugees to their former home in Israel effectively calls for the end of the Jewish State of Israel.

Some supporters of BDS may genuinely believe that these efforts will encourage Israel to change policies toward Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank with which they disagree. However, while some businesses, colleges, and other organizations have endorsed the BDS movement, for the most part campaigns have failed to bring major institutions to divest from Israel or to keep companies and institutions from engaging with Israel or Israelis. BDS campaigns do, however, garner publicity and often have a negative impact on perceptions of Israel. Increasingly, BDS campaigns are used by anti-Israel activists to attract attention to their message, particularly on college campuses where BDS initiatives draw students, faculty, campus organizations, and administrations into a highly politicized and publicized debate.

Often times, BDS campaigns give rise to tensions in communities—particularly on college campuses—that can result in harassment or intimidation of Jews and Israel supporters, including overt antisemitic expression and acts. This dynamic can create an environment in which antisemitism can be expressed more freely.

COUNTERING THE CLAIM THAT ISRAEL IS AN APARTHEID STATE¹

The BDS movement is frequently framed as a struggle against an apartheid state that should be fought in the same manner as the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. While Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip may encounter hardships as a result of Israeli security policies, there is no Israeli policy or plan to segregate, persecute, or mistreat the Arab population. Comparisons of Israel to apartheid South Africa are unfair because:

- The South African regime imposed strict segregation laws that banned blacks from “white areas,” prevented interracial marriages, and regulated the education of black children among many other policies. No such separation laws exist in Israel.

- The Israeli Declaration of Independence safeguards the equal rights of all citizens. Arab citizens have equal educational opportunities and the right to vote, to organize politically, and to speak freely. They serve as members of Israel’s security forces, parliament, and as judges.
- Israel’s acceptance of a two-state solution (which includes a state for the Palestinians) as the outcome of bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations disproves accusations that Israel’s goal is the persecution of Palestinians.

Former South African Constitutional Court Justice Richard Goldstone wrote in a New York Times op-ed that accusing Israel of apartheid “is an unfair and inaccurate slander against Israel, calculated to retard rather than advance peace negotiations.”

ADDITIONAL READING

ADL. BDS: The Global Campaign to Delegitimize Israel.

adl.org/resources/backgrounders/bds-the-global-campaign-to-delegitimize-israel

Halbfinger, D.M., Wines, M. and Erlanger, S. (2019, July 28). Is B.D.S. Anti-Semitic? A Closer Look at the Boycott Israel Campaign. NY Times.

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Flayton, Blake (2019, November 14). On the Frontlines of Progressive Anti-Semitism. NY Times.

nytimes.com/2019/11/14/opinion/college-israel-anti-semitism.html

¹ Excerpted from Anti-Defamation League. Response To Common Inaccuracy: Israel is an Apartheid State. Retrieved from adl.org/resources/fact-sheets/response-to-common-inaccuracy-israel-is-an-apartheid-state#.V5ZUhpkrLct.