



In July 2005, 170 Palestinian civil society organizations issued a unified call to the international community to initiate boycott, divestment and sanction (BDS) activities against Israel. Since then, many organizations and individuals have responded to this call, including important Canadian organizations. Opponents of the BDS movement have criticized the movement stridently, some suggesting it is motivated by hate, others suggesting it constitutes a new form of anti-Semitism.¹ Proponents, however, argue that it is simply an international social justice movement, intended to pressure Israel to respect the human rights of Palestinians.

What motivates the BDS movement?

In contravention of UN resolutions 242 and 338, Israel has militarily occupied the West Bank and Gaza since 1967. Since then, Palestinian resistance to this occupation – through diplomacy, peaceful resistance, and armed resistance – has taken many forms. Launched almost 40 years after Israel's military occupation was imposed, the BDS movement seeks:

1. An end to Israel's occupation and colonization of all Palestinian land²
2. The dismantling of Israel's Wall³
3. Full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel; and
4. Respect for the rights of Palestinian refugees⁴

All of the demands of the BDS movement align with international law and long-standing UN resolutions. As such:

- BDS is an entirely legitimate, democratic, and non-violent means of protest and pressure
- Because it is grounded in principles of international law, BDS is neither "anti-Israel" nor "anti-Semitic."
- BDS is appropriate at this time, because it is the Palestinians themselves who have called for BDS actions

BDS actions include boycotts (e.g. consumer boycotts, academic/cultural and sports boycotts), divestments (e.g. from pension and endowment portfolios), and sanctions, (i.e. calls for governments to end economic or military cooperation or ties with Israel).

Basically, the BDS condemns Israel's unjust and/or illegal behaviour. When the injustice and violations end, so will the BDS action.

Why is Israel targeted? Why not other countries?

- It is a response to an explicit call from the Palestinian people.
- BDS can be effective because Israel is a trading nation (unlike North Korea, for example.)
- It does not hold Israel to any higher standard than it claims for itself. There are countries that commit equal or greater human rights violations, but they do not claim a place among Western democratic nations as does Israel.
- Israel's injustices toward the Palestinians are unique in many ways: Israel maintains one of the longest occupations in modern history; Israel maintains a regime with race-based laws in the territory it occupies; Israel's injustices are ongoing – new crimes are committed on a daily basis (e.g. house demolitions, torture, indefinite detention); etc.

Is BDS an appropriate way for Canadians to pressure Israel?

- The right to speak freely is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- In open and democratic societies such as Canada's, free expression of opinion is encouraged. One does not have to agree with an opinion in order to defend the right for it to be expressed.
- You cannot suppress the democratic right of Canadians in the interest of a foreign country.
- We can criticize policies of the Canadian government. Why can't we criticize Israel's policies?
- Boycotts, divesting, and sanctions are purely democratic exercises, driven by the personal conviction and conscience of the individuals and societies imposing them.

Is BDS anti-Israel? Does it seek to destroy Israel?

- It's not "anti-Israel" to expect the Israeli regime to meet its obligations under international law. The State of Israel has the same rights and obligations under international law as any other state.
- BDS will never "destroy" Israel. Instead, it hopes to pressure Israel economically until Israel ceases its illegal activities.
- The State of Israel will continue to exist after it meets its obligations to comply with international law and recognize the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.
- When the world boycotted Apartheid South Africa, nobody wondered if it was based on "anti-white" or "anti-Protestant" motives.

What specific injustices is Israel committing?⁵

The Palestinian call for international BDS action mentions the following specific injustices:

- Continued construction of the Wall built on occupied Palestinian territory, in contempt of the International Court of Justice's 2004 finding that the Wall and its associated regime are illegal.
- Continued expansion of Israeli colonies, to a population of at least 600,000, 47 years into Israel's occupation of the Palestinian West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan Heights.
- Unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, and *de facto* annexation of large parts of the West Bank by means of the Wall.
- Sixty years after the State of Israel was built mainly on land ethnically cleansed of its Palestinian owners, a majority of Palestinians are still refugees, most of whom are stateless.
- Israel's entrenched system of racial discrimination against its own Arab-Palestinian citizens.

Will BDS hurt the Palestinians too?

- This criticism is similar to criticisms that the boycott of Apartheid South Africa would hurt black South Africans. Yet just as in the case of South Africa, most Palestinians unequivocally support the long-term economic and social gains possible through BDS

- It is the Palestinians themselves who have called for BDS, recognizing both its short-term and long-term implications.
- Numerous reports cite the Israeli occupation as the cause of severe ongoing economic hardship for the Palestinians. Were the occupation to cease, there would be an economic boom in Palestine due to the ensuing economic freedom.⁶

Has BDS had successes in Canada?^{7 8}

Yes, there are hundreds of Canadian institutions – church denominations, unions, organizations, etc. – which have endorsed BDS. Three significant breakthroughs have been:

- May 2006: CUPE Ontario voted to support a global campaign against Israel's apartheid-like policies until that state recognizes "the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination."
- April 2008: The Canadian Union of Postal Workers passed a resolution in support of the global campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israeli Apartheid.
- August 2012: While not specifically endorsing BDS, the United Church of Canada resolved to economically pressure Israel on its "settlements" with the intent of pressuring it to end its military occupation of the Palestinian territories.

¹ MacDonald, Neil, "Ottawa cites hate crime laws when asked about its 'zero tolerance' for Israel boycotters," CBC News online, May 11, 2015

² UN Security Council resolution 242 of 1967 calls on Israel to withdraw from the territories it had recently occupied, in accordance with the UN Charter, and the Fourth Geneva Convention, Art. 49, prohibits the colonization of militarily occupied land.

³ The International Court of Justice decision of 2004 called for the dismantling of Israel's Wall.

⁴ UN Resolution 194 enshrines the legal rights of Palestinian refugees.

⁵ "Palestinian Civil Society Calls for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel Until it Complies with International Law and Universal Principles of Human Rights," Global BDS Movement, July 9, 2005, retrieved on Feb. 13, 2010.

⁶ "Occupation costs Palestinians 'billions': World Bank report says Palestinian economy could expand by a third if Israel lifted restrictions in West Bank," Aljazeera English, Oct. 9, 2013

⁷ "International Boycott-Related Initiatives," Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) and U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, retrieved on Feb. 25, 2010.

⁸ "Search results for 'successful actions,'" U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, retrieved 2010.02.25