



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. The following are talking points to guide discussion on this topic.

### **Key Messages**

- BDS is a legitimate means of protest and pressure
- BDS is neither “anti-Israel” nor “anti-Semitic”
- It is the Palestinians themselves who have called for BDS actions

### **What are boycotts, divestments and sanctions (BDS) against Israel?**

- BDS actions are conscience-based decisions taken by individuals and organizations – as consumers, workers, business owners and investors – to refuse to do business with an Israeli regime which is committing injustices against the Palestinian people.
- 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).

### **BDS is legitimate because...**

It is not arbitrary, but based on an explicit call to Action from 170 Palestinian civil society organizations.<sup>1</sup>

- It is deliberately non-violent.
- It is grounded on principles of international law.
- It condemns unjust behaviour. When the injustice ends, so will the BDS action.

### **Why Israel? 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 the longest occupation in modern history; Israel maintains a regime of apartheid 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.

### **BDS is an appropriate way 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?

### **BDS is not anti-Israel. BDS does not aim 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 cripple 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.

### **BDS is not anti-Semitic**

- BDS is about Israel’s illegal behaviour, not about anti-Semitism.
- When the world boycotted Apartheid South Africa, nobody wondered if it was based on “anti-white” or “anti-Protestant” motives.
- Attacking the advocates of this campaign, rather than addressing their arguments, is a well-known evasive debate tactic.

### **What specific injustices is Israel committing?**

The Palestinian Call for international BDS Action lists the following...

- 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 almost 500,000, 40 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.”<sup>2</sup>

### **When will BDS end? What must Israel do to end the BDS actions?**

The Palestinian call suggests that BDS should remain in effect until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination, and complies with international law regarding:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan Heights;
2. Recognizing the rights of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality;
3. Respecting the rights of Palestinian refugees as per UN resolution 194<sup>3</sup>

### **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, Palestinian leaders 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.

### **What BDS actions have been successful thus far?** <sup>4 5</sup>

- June 2005: The New England Conference of the United Methodist Church passed a resolution calling for voluntary selective divestment from companies that profit from the Israeli occupation.
- 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.”
- August 2006: The Edinburgh and Locarno International Film Festivals both renounced financial

support from the Israeli government.

- April 2007: The British National Union of Journalists voted for a boycott of Israeli goods as part of a protest against the war in Lebanon.
- May 2007: Britain's University and College Union voted to boycott Israeli Academic Institutions and condemn the 'complicity of Israeli academia in the occupation.'
- 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.
- February 2009: Dock workers from the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union refused to offload a ship from Israel.
- February 2009: Hampshire College became the first college or university in the U.S. to divest from companies on the grounds of their involvement in the Israeli occupation of Palestine.
- February 2009: Cardiff University divested all shares from BAE Systems and GE's aerospace arm over their dealings with the Israeli Defence Forces.
- August 2009: Amnesty International withdrew from Leonard Cohen's Israel Concert Fund.

### **There are other reasons BDS makes sense now**

- For decades, all other approaches to resolving the Middle East conflict have failed to bear fruit. Notably:
  - UN resolutions calling Israel to change its policies and/or implement international law have failed to move Israel
  - The Negotiations Process has failed to bring an improvement to the lot or lives of the Palestinians, despite the generous offer of the Arab League. In fact, while the Negotiations Process limps along, Israel continues to expand its rights violations on the ground (e.g. expansion of Israeli colonies, etc.)
  - Independent international condemnation of Israeli abuses, e.g. the 2001 unanimous declaration of the signatories to the Fourth Geneva Convention, have failed to move Israel.
  - The 2004 scathing ruling of the International Court of Justice on Israel's Wall and associated regime failed to move Israel
- Individuals and civil society organizations can also further the cause of peace by taking actions which draw attention to injustices.

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<sup>1</sup> "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, <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/52>, retrieved 2010.02.13

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "International Boycott-Related Initiatives," Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), <http://www.pacbi.org/einside.php?id=67>, retrieved 2010.02.25 U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, <http://usacbi.wordpress.com/?s=successful+actions>, retrieved 2010.02.25

<sup>5</sup> "Search results for 'successful actions,'" U.S. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, <http://usacbi.wordpress.com/?s=successful+actions>, retrieved 2010.02.25