

**WE BELIEVE
IN ISRAEL**

Key Facts About Israel

ISRAEL - A BEACON OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

- Israel defines itself as a Jewish and democratic state, but in almost all aspects, Israel is a secular state, and freedom of religion is respected.
- The vision of Israel's founders was of an open and democratic state with a Jewish majority in which non-Jews would enjoy full and equal rights. The principle of equality for all citizens was enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence and is protected by Israel's Supreme Court.
- Israel is home to many religious minorities and guarantees their right to practice and administer their religions.
- 20 percent of Israel's population (1.4 million people) are non-Jews.
- The State of Israel officially recognises 15 different religious groups, each of which regulates its own rules about marriage, divorce and wills.
- Christians make up 2.1 percent of the non-Jewish population of Israel and increased from 34,000 in 1948 to 180,000 in 2000. Israel is the only Middle Eastern country where the Christian population has grown in the last fifty years.
- This stands in contrast to the Palestinian Authority, where there is no law protecting freedom of religion, Christian holy sites have been desecrated, and Palestinian Christians suffer harassment from Palestinian Muslims. This situation means the Christian population in the West Bank and Gaza is rapidly dwindling through emigration.

ISRAEL AND PEACE

- Israel has repeatedly engaged in efforts to make peace with its neighbours based on the principles of land for peace. Israel agreed to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in return for peace and recognition in 1979. Israel withdrew from Palestinian population centres in Gaza and the West Bank as part of the Oslo Accords with the PLO signed in 1993. It also made territorial concessions to Jordan as part of the 1994 peace treaty between the two countries. In 2000, Israel complied with Security Council resolutions relating to Lebanon by withdrawing all its forces from south Lebanon. In 2005, Israel withdrew uni-laterally from the Gaza Strip and part of the northern West Bank.
- Every Israeli government since 2000 has publicly committed Israel to the two-state solution as the best way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This solution, as defined by the Clinton parameters in December 2000, is a solution which results in, 'the state of Palestine as the homeland of the Palestinian people and the state of Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people.'
- The principle of the two-state solution is that a Palestinian state will be created within the territory of Gaza and the West Bank, and will exist alongside and at peace with Israel. Repeated polls indicate that a majority of Israelis and Palestinians accept this idea, though it involves difficult compromises on both sides. For Israel it means giving up control of territory in the West Bank which is of great historic, cultural and strategic importance for the Jewish people. For Palestinians it means accepting that the solution for the Palestinian refugee problem lies not in refugees returning to Israel but in returning to a new Palestinian state.

WHY BOYCOTT CALLS ARE WRONG

- A boycott would do nothing to contribute to the advancement of a peaceful and just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Far from helping the Palestinians, a boycott would hinder the development of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians on which prospects for future peace and security rely.
- The goal of peace depends on two sides, Israelis and Palestinians, working together with international support towards the mutual goal of a negotiated two-state solution. An environment of rejection and misdirected pressure targeted at Israel is counterproductive to an internationally-backed peace process premised on the development of mutual understanding and respect for both sides.
- An academic and cultural boycott, which has been promoted by various trade unions and other activists, contradicts the principles of scientific ethics and the open spirit of international cooperation between scientists, artists and others. It is particularly counterproductive to target Israel's academic community, which has a proud record of promoting honest debate, criticism and self-examination within Israeli society.
- Israel's universities have a significant Arab student intake and are important forums for interaction and cooperation between Jews and Arabs. Arab citizens of Israel have increasingly risen to high ranks within Israeli academia.
- Whereas Israel, an open and democratic state in which Jewish and Arab citizens enjoy equal rights, and which embraces free academic inquiry, has been threatened with a boycott, no other country is subject to such a campaign. Prominent Palestinian academics such as Sari Nusseibeh, President of Al Quds University in East Jerusalem, have been firm critics of the movement to boycott Israeli universities and academics.
- Similarly, an economic boycott cannot help the Palestinian people, whose future prosperity depends on creating an atmosphere of economic and political cooperation.
- Since Israel's establishment, the Arab world has tried to use an economic boycott to isolate and weaken Israel economically, and thus make the state non-viable. Whilst Egypt and Jordan have direct trade links with Israel, most Arab states are reluctant to trade directly with Israel. The Roadmap peace plan specifically calls for the normalisation of relations between the Arab states and Israel, including the return of trade links.

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