



BDS: At a Glance

Jerusalem U's short guide to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement has been designed to answer basic questions about BDS, its relation to the campaign to delegitimize Israel, and its context in larger social action movements.

What is delegitimization of Israel?

Delegitimization is the rejection of the legitimacy of the State of Israel as the rightful nation-state of the Jewish people. Delegitimization often manifests itself through campaigns that deny Israel's right to exist; demonize Israel; compare its policies with Nazism, apartheid and racist ideologies; promote a one-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; and/or hold Israel to double standards.

What is the delegitimization movement's goal?

The delegitimization movement has a single goal: to bring about the destruction of Israel as the sovereign democratic state of the Jewish people.

What is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement?

The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS) is the most well-known tool of the delegitimization campaign. It is made up of a loosely organized group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals who pressure governments, groups and others to impose economic sanctions on Israel, encourage them to boycott Israeli businesses and cultural and academic institutions, and call for the divestment of economic resources from Israeli companies. Organizations such as Jewish Voices for Peace, American Muslims for Palestine, Palestine Legal, and others provide professional services and guidance to student activists on campus, helping to create a well-run machine of anti-Israel propaganda and activity.

What are the BDS movement's goals?

The BDS movement's goal is to end the State of Israel. This goal is couched in language intended to create a veil of legitimacy around the BDS movement, through its call for Israel to

- accept the right of return of Palestinian refugees to the modern State of Israel,
- provide full equality of Arab-Palestinian citizens according to Israeli law,
- end the "occupation" and colonization of Arab lands, and dismantle the "Wall," or security barrier.

Full right of return of Palestinian refugees goes beyond United Nations recommendations on the issue, and ignores the fact that the repatriation of Palestinian refugees to Israel would require the State to care for a population that jeopardizes its security and stability—something that even the UN does not require of Israel. Moreover, Israel is a democratic state; all of its citizens, including Arab-Israelis, have had full equality under the law since Israel's founding in 1948. For the BDS movement to suggest otherwise is false and creates a perception of an apartheid regime where institutionalized racism is permitted. Additionally, in Palestinian parlance, the "occupation" does not go back to the 1967 War, but is actually dated to 1948,



when Israel was founded, and the War of Independence. When the BDS movement calls for an end to “occupation,” they are really calling for the demise of the Jewish state. Comparing Israelis to “colonizers” further contributes to the false image of Israel as an illegitimate state, despite the international community’s recognition of the Jewish people’s right to a state in their ancestral homeland.

When did the BDS movement begin?

The BDS movement was officially launched in 2005, but its origins are found in the 2001 Durban, South Africa “NGO Forum against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance,” which was marked by vitriolic expressions of anti-Semitism by a group of radical NGOs. The Forum claimed that Zionism was a form of racism, and that Israel is an apartheid state. The Forum’s concluding statement declared that Israel was guilty of “racist crimes including war crimes, acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing,” and it promoted a “policy of complete and total isolation of Israel...the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes, and the full cessation of all links (diplomatic, economic, social, financial aid, military cooperation and training) between all states and Israel.”

Where does the BDS movement focus its efforts?

The BDS movement focuses its efforts on “caring communities,” those who are conscience-driven and who care about human and civil rights. In its effort to paint Israel as a pariah state, the BDS movement attempts to destroy the goodwill of progressives toward the state of Israel and isolate it from other Western democracies. BDS initiatives are often geared toward academics, colleges, church associations, cultural institutions, artists, labor unions, and corporations.

Hasn’t the Jewish community been involved in boycott movements in the past? What makes BDS different?

The Jewish community has supported boycott, divestment, and sanctions movements in the past, specifically in regard to apartheid South Africa, and currently, Iran. In these particular situations, boycott, divestment, and sanctions were tools utilized to bring rogue states to heel and cause them to cease their serious human rights violations and dangerous weapons programs. It is important to note that while the tactics of boycott, divestment, and sanctions themselves are inherently “value neutral,” their intention and direction determines whether or not they are appropriate in a given situation.

Utilizing BDS against Israel is a profound misuse of these tactics. The BDS movement commonly compares Israel to South Africa, seeking to equate the Jewish state with the apartheid regime. This is a fabricated allegation. Israel is a pluralistic democratic society in which all of its citizens are equal before the law, in contrast to South Africa’s policies under apartheid. The BDS movement uses lies and exaggeration to defame Israel, along with misinterpretation of international law. BDS supporters claim that boycotting, divesting from, or sanctioning Israel will bring about a peaceful solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. In reality, the BDS movement seeks only to destroy the Jewish character of the State of Israel by preying on the good intentions of thoughtful, caring individuals who believe in social justice and human rights.