

### Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions

Some Palestinians are asking people around the world to take part in a campaign of “Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions” to end human rights abuses by Israel.

According to BDS.net, the movement calls on Israel to:

- end its occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands and to dismantle the Wall
- recognise the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality
- respect, protect and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.



Protesters calling for a boycott of Israel / wikimedia.org

Many people and organisations across the world actively support the BDS movement, but it is controversial and many argue it is antisemitic for targeting Israel, the Jewish state.

### What is the BDS movement doing?

The official BDS movement states that:

What is happening?

#### BOYCOTTS

involve withdrawing support for Israel and Israeli and international companies that are involved in the violation of Palestinian human rights, as well as complicit Israeli sporting, cultural and academic institutions.

Ordinary people can change their purchasing decisions to influence companies. Companies such as Veolia, Orange, G4S and CRH have responded by reducing or ending trade in Israel.

Many musicians and artists have cancelled shows or pledged to boycott.

#### DIVESTMENT

campaigns urge banks, local councils, churches, pension funds and universities to withdraw investments from all Israeli companies and from international companies involved in violating Palestinian rights.

In 2018 the UN said there were 206 companies linked with Israeli settlements.

Pension funds in the Netherlands and Norway and a number of churches and student bodies have divested.

#### SANCTIONS

campaigns pressure governments to fulfil their legal obligation to hold Israel to account including by ending military trade, free-trade agreements and expelling Israel from international forums such as the UN and FIFA.

Israel is not subject to major sanctions. Most Arab states that once observed an economic boycott no longer enforce it. Syria, Lebanon, and Iran try not to trade in ways that strengthen Israel, but that started before BDS.

Western countries do not impose sanctions and the USA gives billions of dollars in financial aid to Israel, which some fear makes Israel unlikely to change policies.

## RESOURCE 30-A

### Who is involved in BDS?

In 2005 a range of Palestinian organisations called for an international BDS movement. They included political parties, trade unions and women's unions.

Inspired by the anti-Apartheid campaign in South Africa, Omar Barghouti was one of the founders of the BDS movement. Born in Qatar to a Palestinian family, he moved to Israel in 1993 after marrying an Israeli citizen. Barghouti has travelled to many countries to promote BDS, although the Israeli government banned him from international travel for a time. He won the Gandhi Peace Prize in the USA in 2017. Some countries support BDS but the Israeli government and countries like the USA and the UK are debating laws to ban BDS.

EAPPI is not part of the BDS movement, but it supports the right of organisations and people to take part in nonviolent forms of protest such as BDS. EAPPI does call for an end to trade with Israeli settlements built in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank.



Omar Barghouti. Photo: [dailymaverick.co.za](http://dailymaverick.co.za)

### Is BDS making a difference?

#### 2005

170 Palestinian civil society organisations call for BDS.

#### 2013

The European Investment Bank suspends loans to "virtually all" major Israeli businesses and public bodies to prevent recognition of Israeli sovereignty over territories occupied in 1967.

#### 2016

Israeli water company Mekorot loses international contracts in Brazil, Argentina, Portugal and the Netherlands.

British security company G4S sells most of its Israeli business.

#### 2016–17

Omar Barghouti banned from travelling outside Israel.

#### 2017

Lorde cancels her concert in Israel.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) states that Israel is practising apartheid and calls for BDS.

#### 2018

Natalie Portman, a Jewish American actress, decides not to attend the Genesis Prize in Israel, stating that she is not part of BDS but cannot support prime minister Netanyahu's policies.

Airbnb decides to stop promoting rooms in Israeli settlements in the West Bank.



A group of orthodox Jews and Palestinian Solidarity activists in Whitehall at the end of London's Al-Quds march (Alisdare Hickson, 2018)

## What do people say about BDS?

"Beneath the surface, it's an attempt to delegitimise Israel as a prelude to its elimination."

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

- A. "BDS is perhaps the most ambitious, empowering, and promising Palestinian-led global movement for justice and rights. BDS has the capacity to challenge Israel's colonial rule and apartheid in a morally consistent, effective, and, crucially, intelligent manner."

**Omar Barghouti, BDS founder**

- B. "People are rising up against tyrannical regimes and seeking change in just about every Arab state in 'Israel's neighbourhood'. Some of these governments are now being subject to international sanctions, so why not Israel, which has for decades defied the UN and violated international law?"

**Samah Sabawi, Palestinian poet**

- C. "I am clear that the UK government is deeply committed to promoting our trade and business ties with Israel and accordingly is strongly opposed to the BDS movement. I do not believe that imposing sanctions on Israel would be a constructive step."

**Jeremy Hunt, UK Foreign Secretary**

- D. "I have deplored most of Mr Netanyahu's actions in office. However, I do not believe that a cultural boycott will force Mr Netanyahu from power, nor have I ever heard of a cultural boycott ending a bloody and prolonged conflict... the sharing of art and literature across borders constitutes an immense power for good in this world."

**JK Rowling, author**

- E. "[BDS] is a coming together of citizens to use an historically tested, peaceful tool of resistance... This is a peaceful act of citizens using their purchasing power to make a point [and] to get a government that is rogue to act in a more responsible way and in a more human rights-respectful way."

**Kumi Naidoo, the Secretary General of Amnesty International. Naidoo is from South Africa**

- F. "The success of BDS is particularly impressive because it is a movement that uses the language of rights, but deals in practice with denying Israel's right to exist. The result is a major deception."

**Dror Yemeni, Israeli journalist**

- G. "Jewish Voice for Peace endorses the call from Palestinian civil society for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) as part of our work for freedom, justice and equality for all people."

**Grace Paley, Jewish American author and activist**

- H. "It's true that this conflict is not special in how bad the violations are. What is special is how much the liberal west actively supports them."

**Kobi Smith, Israeli academic and member of Boycott from Within**



### Discuss with a partner

- Which quotes support BDS and which ones say it is wrong?
- Which quotes contain factual information as well as opinions?
- Which arguments do you find more or less persuasive and why?

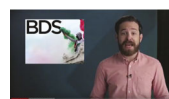
### Boycott or not? What do you think?

- Write about whether you think the BDS movement is just, and why. Refer to your own criteria for what makes a boycott just or unjust.

### More information:

You can read more about how the BDS movement describes itself here:

[bdsmovement.net](http://bdsmovement.net)



#### Videos:

**The Movement To Boycott Israel Explained**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5u4EwdspPc>



**Rabbi Sacks on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K\\_pQfsi437A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_pQfsi437A)