

Resolution Against Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions Movement

Background

In recent years, anti-Israel activists have honed in on Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) as a tactic to isolate and demonize the State of Israel. This strategy was intensified after the infamous 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. The goal of the campaign is to draw the odious and spurious comparison between Apartheid and the Jewish state.

The BDS tactic has been endorsed by 170 pro-Palestinian parties, organizations, trade unions and movements. Many of these groups are loosely connected and share similar materials. Common to most BDS calls are distortions and outright fabrications of facts, misrepresentations of international law, and a false assertion that the proffered action somehow will improve the condition of Palestinians. Although often focused on “occupation” as the root of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, almost all BDS activists embrace, in some form, an end to Israel as a Jewish state – some as a direct position, most through anti-Zionist stances and a call for a Palestinian “right of return.”

The spheres in which the BDS movement operates include, but are not limited to, Campus/Academic, Church, Civic, Corporate, and Cultural. Efforts to combat BDS draw from some common strategies, particularly the importance of solid relationships with decision leaders. In each sphere, though, our efforts must employ strategic considerations, messaging, and organizing that are unique to the particular sector.

Examples

Campus/Academia: Anti-Israel divestment campaigns have been waged at dozens of colleges, many tying to the false analogy of campus anti-Apartheid activity. These strident efforts, including inflammatory street demonstrations, have caused tremendous stress to Jewish students. To date, all such campaigns have failed, although activists have claimed success in a few instances due to media attention or votes by campus bodies that were later reversed. In Europe, however, a robust campaign to boycott Israeli academics continues to be parroted by a handful of North American academics.

Churches: BDS activists had a fleeting victory when the Presbyterian Church (USA) adopted a resolution in 2004 declaring Israeli actions to be at the “root of evil acts” committed on both sides of the conflict and calling for “phased selective divestment” of companies operating in Israel. Presbyterians replaced the call with a more general endorsement for socially responsible investments. The United Church of Canada has twice rejected divestment resolutions as have other denominations including the United Methodist Church. Virulent anti-Israel campaigns continue in several denominations, including the publication of anti-Israel polemics by groups supporting BDS.

Internationally, the World Council of Churches and the Anglican Church in England have embraced BDS.

Civic: Several city councils, as well as voters in Somerville MA, have rejected calls for municipal divestment of Israel. In Europe, there have been repeated efforts in labor unions. In North America, labor leaders have publicly condemned BDS.

Corporate: A longstanding BDS effort has focused on Caterpillar, Inc. Shareholder resolutions have repeatedly failed, and the company has rejected calls to restrict its sales

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in contravention of American law. Smaller scale efforts have been waged against a range of companies including sellers to Israel's defense forces, construction industry, and even retailers that sell Israeli products or have operations across the 'green line.'

Cultural: The newest front in the BDS campaign are artistic, athletic and other cultural activities, as was recently experienced with a film festival in Toronto that successfully highlighted ten films from Israel and celebrated Tel Aviv's centennial, despite a BDS campaign. There have been sporadic protests of Israeli entertainers. Overseas, Israeli athletes and teams have been ostracized in several national tournaments.

Action Recommendations

The Federation system has the unique capacity, including grassroots infrastructure, to defeat this challenge. *BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED*, that recognizing and respecting the right of individual organizations and communities to determine their own specific preferred courses of action, The Jewish Federations of North America should:

- Declare that the BDS movement be regarded with the utmost urgency;
- Lead an effective response and devise a proactive strategy to the BDS movement through appropriate vehicles within the system, especially the Israel Advocacy Initiative, a joint project of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) and The Jewish Federations of North America. Components of this strategy include:
 - Conduct research to develop the most effective messages and strategies for the major sectors of BDS activity;
 - Educate Federation and JCRC Professionals and Lay Leadership about the nature, tactics and dangers of the BDS movement;

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- Train local leadership on how to counter BDS initiatives in local communities;
- Mobilize the Federation and JCRC network to be on alert for BDS initiatives and support each other as necessary.

Submitted by

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