

BDS: Globalized Palestinian Resistance to Israeli Annexation and Apartheid

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Fifteen years ago, the broadest coalition in Palestinian society¹ launched the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement for Palestinians rights to contribute to our liberation struggle. With Israel's regime of military occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid² growing far more fanatic in perpetrating, with impunity, war crimes and crimes against humanity against the Indigenous people of Palestine, BDS has become more crucial than ever.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. famously wrote, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."³ This network of mutuality has never been as needed as it is today, as almost every contemporary system of oppression can only be maintained by the conscious complicity of many other systems of oppression, from states, to corporations to institutions. Globalized oppression necessitates globalized resistance and solidarity.

BDS has become a key part of Palestinian popular resistance and *the* most effective⁴ form of international solidarity with the struggle of the Indigenous people of Palestine for freedom, justice and equality. It calls for ending Israel's 1967 occupation, ending its institutionalized and legalized system of racial domination and discrimination⁵, which meets the UN definition of apartheid⁶, and upholding the right of Palestinian refugees to return⁷ to the homes and lands from which they have been uprooted and dispossessed since the 1947-1948 ethnic cleansing, or Nakba.⁸

BDS is deeply rooted in decades of Palestinian popular nonviolent resistance to settler-colonialism and is inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, the US Civil Rights movement and anti-colonial struggles, like in India and Ireland.

¹ <http://www.bdsmovement.net/call>.

² <https://bdsmovement.net/news/united-against-apartheid-colonialism-and-occupation-dignity-justice-palestinian-people-0>, and <https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/how-to-make-international-law-work-for-palestinians/>.

³ https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf.

⁴ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/18-highlights-bds-impact-2018>.

⁵ <https://forward.com/fast-forward/411873/israeli-nation-state-law-is-apartheid-says-democratic-congresswoman/>.

⁶ http://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/ea9aef7-5752-4f84-be94-0a655eb30e16/0/rome_statute_english.pdf.

⁷ http://www.nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/FAQ/Refugees_FAQ_Fact%20Sheet_May2011.pdf.

⁸ <https://imeu.org/article/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba>

Together with the racial, climate and gender justice movements, BDS belongs to an evolving modern paradigm of globalized solidarity and resistance to oppression. Solidarity with an oppressed community emanates mainly from an internationalist commitment to justice, from a sense of *responsibility or obligation* to stand with the oppressed upon recognizing the complicity of one's own state or institution in the oppression at hand, or from realizing that this "remote" oppression is not only supported by one's own state or institutions but is *intersectional*, or organically connected to domestic oppression too. These factors are not mutually exclusive in many cases, including in global solidarity with Palestine.

The "think globally, act locally" motto that has guided many social actors for decades may need an overhaul today, especially in the Trump era. With the emergence of a powerful international far right and authoritarian alliance, resistance to any local regime of racial, economic, social, or national oppression must be more than ever global, intersectional⁹, and consistently moral. This is necessary not only on ethical grounds, but also as a goal-oriented condition for maximizing its chances of success. We must think globally, and act locally with a globalized approach.

The international movement against apartheid in South Africa signaled this particularly radical shift in the very meaning of international solidarity. The African National Congress (ANC) exhorted world citizens, trade unions, churches, and social movements to transcend traditional solidarity by cutting off the lifeline, or the links of complicity, that kept the apartheid system alive.

In the same vein, what Palestinians are asking of India, for instance, is to cut its thriving military trade with Israel which directly enables Israel to continue its crimes against us, while also empowering the militarized, far-right Indian regime to continue its horrific human rights violations in India, not to mention its war crimes and settler-colonial policies in Kashmir. We are not begging for charity; we are demanding the fulfillment of a most profound moral obligation to do no harm.

Inspired by this solidarity tradition, and anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the BDS movement has consistently and categorically opposed all forms of racism and discrimination, including antisemitism.¹⁰ One's identity, the movement upholds, should never

⁹ Kimberle Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. University of Chicago Legal Forum. Volume 1989, Issue 1: <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1052&context=ucf>

¹⁰ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/%E2%80%99Cracism-and-racial-discrimination-are-antithesis-freedom-justice-equality%E2%80%9D>.

diminish or restrict one's entitlement to rights. Our movement targets complicity, not identity.

It is crucial to emphasize that since there is nothing Jewish about Israel's regime of occupation, siege, ethnic cleansing¹¹ and apartheid, there is nothing inherently anti-Jewish, then, about a nonviolent, morally consistent human rights struggle to end this system of oppression.

Based on this inclusiveness, BDS has worked to establish and nourish the bonds of mutual solidarity with movements defending the rights of refugees, immigrants, Blacks, women, workers, Indigenous¹² nations, LGBTQI¹³ communities, ethnic and religious minorities, Dalits, etc. A growing number of anti-colonial Jewish-Israeli BDS supporters¹⁴ play a significant role in exposing Israel's regime of oppression and advocating for isolating it.

Israel's steady and drastic shift¹⁵ to the far right and its alliances¹⁶ with xenophobic, racist and patently antisemitic¹⁷ forces in the U.S.¹⁸, Europe¹⁹, Brazil²⁰, India and elsewhere have played a decisive role in alienating not just progressives but also the liberal mainstream, including younger Jewish Americans.

When the Israeli government hosted last year the prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, who are accused of being anti-immigrant and antisemitic, Likud member of parliament Anat Berko defended the decision saying, "They might be anti-Semites, but they're on our side."²¹

Another major factor behind the steady decline worldwide in Israel's popularity²² is the rising impact of BDS.²³ In this context, defenders of Israel's human rights violations, particularly in

¹¹ <https://www.haaretz.com/ethnic-cleansing-of-palestinians-or-democratic-israel-at-work-1.361196>.

¹² <https://bdsmovement.net/news/standing-rock-occupied-jerusalem-we-resist-desecration-our-burial-sites-and-colonizing-our>.

¹³ <https://www.bdsmovement.net/news/no-eurovision-pinkwashing-more-60-lgbtq-groups-call-boycott-song-contest-israel>.

¹⁴ <http://boycottisrael.info/>.

¹⁵ <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-04-05/netanyahu-drags-election-bound-israel-to-wrong-side-of-history>.

¹⁶ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-the-state-of-israel-vs-the-jewish-people-1.6470108>.

¹⁷ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-rivlin-fighting-anti-semitism-alongside-neo-fascists-is-absolutely-impossible-1.6700658?=&ts=1543644125819>.

¹⁸ <https://www.cufi.org/netanyahu-says-israel-has-no-better-friends-than-us-christian-zionists/>.

¹⁹ <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-u-s-jews-netanyahu-has-now-endorsed-jewish-fascism-cut-your-ties-with-him-now-1.6957970>.

²⁰ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-has-the-jewish-state-forgotten-to-fight-the-anti-semitic-far-right-1.6979814>.

²¹ <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-u-s-jews-netanyahu-has-now-endorsed-jewish-fascism-cut-your-ties-with-him-now-1.6957970>.

²² https://globescan.com/images/images/pressreleases/bbc2017_country_ratings/BBC2017_Country_Ratings_Poll.pdf.

²³ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/18-highlights-bds-impact-2018>.

the U.S. and Europe, have desperately invested massive political and financial resources²⁴ in the last few years to suppress speech on Palestinian rights and demonize BDS. Through intimidation, spying²⁵, and weaponizing claims of antisemitism²⁶, they are trying to keep Israel “on a pedestal,” as Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said²⁷, above accountability and beyond censure.

In harmony with its radical ideological shift to the far-right, Israel has dropped its already torn mask of democracy in its relentless war on the Palestinian people, which aims to disappear us and to erase our quest for freedom altogether.

From the its brutal siege of two million Palestinians in Gaza to its land-grabbing²⁸ construction of illegal settlements²⁹ and gradual ethnic cleansing³⁰, especially in occupied Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and the Naqab (Negev), Israel has for decades been perpetrating what UN investigators concluded were acts that “may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity.”³¹ This is what the ongoing Palestinian Nakba³² looks like.

Israel may not have announced yet its planned *formal* annexation of *more* Palestinian land, but it is set to make use of the “golden opportunity” offered by the racist Trump administration to continue its ongoing *de facto* annexation, as it has done for decades. As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said, “Annexation is illegal. Period. Any annexation.”³³ Hundreds of international law scholars agree. They write that Israel’s ongoing “*de facto* annexation entails the same legal consequences as *de jure* annexation.”³⁴

A thousand European parliamentarians warned: “Failure to adequately respond [to Israeli annexation] would encourage other states with territorial claims to disregard basic principles of international law,” undermining “the most basic norms guiding international relations, including the UN Charter.”³⁵

²⁴ <https://www.haaretz.com/adelson-saban-summit-raises-millions-to-fight-bds-1.5370597>.

²⁵ <https://www.thenation.com/article/how-israel-spies-on-us-citizens/>.

²⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/07/opinion/rashida-tlaib-israel-antisemitism.html>.

²⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/29/comment>.

²⁸ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/democratic-jewish-senator-feinstein-blasts-israel-over-brutal-land-grab-law-1.5430428>.

²⁹ <http://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12657.doc.htm>.

³⁰ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2012/02/403062-un-human-rights-expert-calls-urgent-revision-israeli-housing-policies#.UsZ2iNIW1Bk>.

³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/28/gaza-israel-un-inquiry-killings-protest-war-crimes-army>.

³² <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/05/palestinians-testify-ongoing-nakba-201451561986950.html>.

³³ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26009&LangID=E>.

³⁴ <http://opiniojuris.org/2020/06/11/an-open-letter-to-the-israeli-government-condemning-annexation/>.

³⁵ [https://ps.boell.org/sites/default/files/2020-](https://ps.boell.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/20200611Joint%20letter%20by%201080%20European%20parliamentarians%20against%20Israeli%20annexation_0.pdf)

[06/20200611Joint%20letter%20by%201080%20European%20parliamentarians%20against%20Israeli%20annexation_0.pdf](https://ps.boell.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/20200611Joint%20letter%20by%201080%20European%20parliamentarians%20against%20Israeli%20annexation_0.pdf).

Palestinian civil society has issued a unified appeal for targeted and lawful sanctions³⁶ to stop what tens of UN human rights experts have describe as a “21st century apartheid.”³⁷ In an impressive Global South response to this call, seven former presidents of Latin American countries³⁸ and two former president of South Africa³⁹, along with hundreds of public officials, parliamentarians, trade union leaders, academics, artists, feminists and others, from Asia, Africa and Latin America, have endorsed sanctions to stop Israel’s annexation and apartheid.

The Chilean Senate voted overwhelmingly⁴⁰ for sweeping sanctions against Israel if it goes ahead with its formal annexation plans, while the Belgian⁴¹ and Dutch⁴² parliaments voted for what was widely understood as sanctions.

If Palestinian rights are seen today by much of the world as the “litmus test for human rights,” as described by John Dugard, prominent South African jurist and former UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights,⁴³ support for BDS, whether vocal or discreet, has become a litmus test for meaningful international solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle.

As an Indigenous people, Palestinians have always been inspired by liberation struggles from India to South Africa, from Cuba to Algeria, and from Ireland to Vietnam and beyond. Today we are also deeply inspired by the Black-led uprising against systemic racism and white supremacy in the US, which is organically connected to the global resistance to the US imperialist role worldwide.

Successive US administrations have simultaneously maintained a system of racial oppression and disenfranchisement domestically, while sponsoring or supporting, often with Israel’s help, dictatorships, far-right regimes and death squads internationally, to maintain the hegemony of multinationals and large banks over many nations in the Global South and perpetuate their pillage and exploitation.

Israel is, it is important to mention, the number one international trainer of US law enforcement forces. So, it is no surprise that a few years ago, the Movement for Black Lives

³⁶ <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/17049.html>.

³⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1066452>.

³⁸ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/latin-american-leaders-support-call-for-sanctions-israel>.

³⁹ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/250-prominent-south-africans-call-for-sanctions-stop-annexation>.

⁴⁰ <http://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?id=1U5d6sa118621735155a1U5d6s>.

⁴¹ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/belgium-mps-vote-recognise-palestinian-statehood-move-against-israeli-annexation>.

⁴² <https://www.jta.org/quick-reads/dutch-parliament-calls-for-sanctions-on-israel-in-case-of-annexation-following-belgiums-lead>.

⁴³ John Dugard, The Future of International Law: A Human Rights Perspective, lecture. Internationaal Publiekrecht aan de Universiteit Leiden, April 20, 2007. https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/12401/afscheidsrede_dugard.pdf?sequence=1

adopted BDS to counter Israeli apartheid. And it is certainly no surprise that BDS has strongly and consistently stood with Black justice and liberation struggles, in the US and everywhere.

If “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed,” as the South African Black Consciousness leader Steven Biko writes⁴⁴, then BDS is particularly crucial because of its role in decolonizing Palestinian minds, not just in contributing to the decolonization of Palestinian land.

A common strategy adopted by oppressive regimes is to infect our minds with the fatal virus of despair through dehumanization, isolation, and violent crushing of any resistance with disproportionate force and premeditated savagery.

Aside from the Palestinian people’s heroic sumud⁴⁵, or steadfastness, in the face of this relentless Israeli colonization of our minds, BDS has become a major source of realistic hope for Palestinians.

In September 2015, Veolia⁴⁶, the French corporate giant, became the first international company to end all its involvement in illegal Israeli operations, following an extensive seven-year BDS campaign that cost it tenders around the world worth billions of dollars. This has triggered a domino effect, with companies like the telecommunications giant Orange⁴⁷ and Ireland’s largest building materials company CRH⁴⁸ also pulling out of Israel’s economy in 2016.

Bowing to BDS pressure after suffering what the Financial Times called⁴⁹, “reputational damage,” G4S, the world’s largest private security company, decided also in 2016 to end⁵⁰ most of its involvement in illegal Israeli business. G4S had lost contracts in Jordan, Norway, Lebanon, the European Parliament, South Africa, and Colombia, among others. But G4S remains a global BDS target because of its major role in training Israeli police forces,

⁴⁴ https://www.academia.edu/21658434/Steve_Biko._I_Write_what_I_like.

⁴⁵ [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5731605/.](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5731605/)

⁴⁶ <http://whoprofits.org/content/veolia-sells-its-shares-jerusalem-light-rail-and-completes-withdrawal-israeli-market.>

⁴⁷ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/orange-drops-israel-affiliate-following-inspiring-bds-campaign#sthash.0wMoKN28.dpuf.>

⁴⁸ <https://bdsmovement.net/2016/crh-divests-israel-nesher-13656#sthash.FPLIEmlC.dpuf.>

⁴⁹ http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/72789bbe-e5cf-11e5-bc31-138df2ae9ee6,Authorised=false.html?siteedition=intl&_i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2F72789bbe-e5cf-11e5-bc31-138df2ae9ee6.html%3Fsiteedition%3Dintl&_i_referer=&classification=conditional_standard&iab=barrier-app#axzz42RtbnhB2.

⁵⁰ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/under-bds-pressure-g4s-ends-most-illegal-business-israel.>

notorious for their involvement in war crimes against Palestinians, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem.⁵¹

Today, members of the US Congress endorse BDS or defend the right to advocate for BDS⁵² and call for leveraging US aid to Israel⁵³ to hold it accountable to international law.

Mainstream churches in South Africa have endorsed BDS, while in 2016, the United Methodist Church declared the five largest Israeli banks off limits for investment and divested from the two that it held in its portfolios.⁵⁴ The Presbyterian Church USA in 2014 divested from Hewlett Packard, Motorola Solutions and Caterpillar over their involvement in Israel's human rights violations.

More recently, the largest Dutch Pension Fund, ABP, has divested from two Israeli banks, Leumi and Hapoalim over concerns about human rights, following the earlier lead of the Luxembourg sovereign fund.⁵⁵

The city of Dublin in 2018 became the first European capital to adopt BDS.⁵⁶ Tens of cities, and hundreds of cultural institutions and public spaces in the Spanish state, Italy, Belgium, Norway, Ireland and elsewhere have declared themselves Apartheid Free Zones⁵⁷, calling for an arms embargo on Israel, or excluding from public tenders corporations that are implicated in Israel's human rights violations.

In short, despite Israel's power and the international complicity in its regime of colonial oppression, Palestinians will never give up hope and will never stop resisting oppression until we achieve our freedom, justice and equality.

As the recently published Cry for Hope statement, issued by Kairos Palestine and endorsed by faith communities worldwide, says, "The present times call for actions as bold, as faithful, and as resolute." In response to Israel's ongoing annexation and grave violations of Palestinian human rights, Palestinian civil society is calling for⁵⁸:

⁵¹ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/global-security-company-g4s-deepens-ties-israeli-apartheid-boycott-g4s>.

⁵² <https://www.sanders.senate.gov/newsroom/recent-business/sanders-feinstein-oppose-inclusion-of-israel-anti-boycott-act-in-appropriations-bill>.

⁵³ <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/467772-sanders-floats-leveraging-aid-to-israel-to-push-for-policy-changes>.

⁵⁴ https://www.kairosresponse.org/pr_umc_divests_israeli_banks_jan2016.html.

⁵⁵ https://twitter.com/h_lovatt/status/1275376837166800898.

⁵⁶ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/dublin-becomes-first-european-capital-endorse-bds-palestinian-rights-drops-hewlett-packard-its>.

⁵⁷ <https://bdsmovement.net/apartheid-free-zones>.

⁵⁸ <http://www.alhaq.org/palestinian-human-rights-organizations-council/16890.html>.

1. **A ban on arms trade and military-security cooperation with Israel.**
2. **Suspension of trade and cooperation agreements with Israel.**
3. **Prohibition of trade with the illegal Israeli settlements and termination of corporate business with Israel's illegal settlement enterprise.**
4. **Investigation and prosecution of individuals and corporate actors responsible for war crimes/crimes against humanity in the context of Israel's regime of illegal occupation and apartheid.**
5. **Supporting efforts to reconstitute the UN Special Committee against Apartheid⁵⁹ and the UN Centre against Apartheid to investigate Israeli apartheid.**

Israel's regime of oppression and its anti-Palestinian authoritarian allies fear our shining a light of truth that reveals their lies and oppression. They dread our tireless quest for justice and equality. They loathe our love for freedom and our insistence on nothing less than an existence with dignity and "the full menu of rights,"⁶⁰ to borrow from South African leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

We count on you to help us realize our South African moment.

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⁵⁹ <https://cihrs.org/united-nations-in-response-to-unprecedented-recognition-of-israels-apartheid-regime-states-must-take-concrete-steps-to-end-this-unjust-reality/?lang=en>.

⁶⁰ <https://mg.co.za/article/2012-06-24-ns-want-the-full-menu-of-rights/>.