

# **BDS is Not Anti-Semitic**

## **LA Jews for Peace Policy Statement, Jan. 24, 2019**

The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement, known as BDS, is supported by tens of thousands of individuals around the world. It is not anti-Semitic; except for a minority, as in any group, BDS activists do not act out of hatred of Jews. Rather they act in support of Palestinian rights. In addition, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects boycotts as legitimate, nonviolent, political protest.

Two arguments are used to accuse the BDS Movement of being anti-Semitic: (1) it uses a double standard against Israel, and (2) it denies Israel's right to exist.

The **double standard argument** asserts that it is anti-Semitic to hold Israel, the world's only Jewish state, to a higher standard than other countries. This reasoning holds that, for BDS activists to boycott Israel for human rights abuses against Palestinians, they must also boycott other countries with rights abuses equal to or worse than Israel's.

Such a requirement is unrealistic. International movements to boycott a country arise in response to a popular movement within the country that calls for the boycott; something that almost never happens. In the 1980s, the African National Congress advocated for a similar boycott of South Africa with a view to ending that country's apartheid regime.

That happened in 2005 when Palestinian civil society called for a BDS movement against Israel until it ends the occupation of territories it conquered in 1967 (the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and Golan Heights), offers "full equality" to Arab citizens living inside Israel's 1967 lines, and allows Palestinian refugees to return to their homes per U.N. Resolution 194.

BDS activists boycott Israel because they see that Palestinian rights are violated. Some identify with the Palestinian people and want to relieve their suffering and support their struggle for freedom, justice, and equality. Others identify with Jewish values of universal justice and want to stop Israel from perpetuating the Occupation in the name of the Jewish people. Neither motive is driven by hatred of Jews; neither is anti-Semitic.

The second argument says that **BDS denies Israel's right to exist**, especially by promoting the Palestinian right of return. Palestinians and their supporters do not pursue BDS to destroy Israel. Rather they strive to regain the land and homes Palestinians lost in *the Nakba* ["catastrophe"] during the 1948 formation of Israel and again after the 1967 war. In opposition are some Israeli Jews who want to keep all the land they now control. That goal violates many U.N. resolutions.

Focusing on the Palestinian right of return distorts BDS Movement's overall goal of freedom, justice, and equality for the Palestinian people.

**LA Jews for Peace** members have a range of views on BDS from full acceptance to sympathy or partial acceptance (e.g., some feel the focus should be on government sanctions; others only support boycotts of West Bank settlements). However, all members understand that the First Amendment protects the nonviolent, political BDS Movement that is dedicated to justice and equality, and insist that seeking justice and equality is not inherently anti-Semitic. In fact, it is a traditional Jewish value.