



# What is BDS and Why Should You Support It?

On July 9, 2005, in an historic moment of collective consciousness fueled by almost a century of struggle against settler colonialism and apartheid, the majority of Palestinian civil society issued the call for *Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions* (BDS) in opposition to Israel's failure to comply with international law.

Consisting of more than 170 Palestinian civil society groups, including all major political parties, refugee rights associations, trade union federations, women's unions, NGO networks, and a plethora of grassroots organizations, the BDS movement called for international civil society organizations and people of conscience to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era.

The BDS Call, anchored in international law and universal principles of human rights, has taken a comprehensive rights-based approach. It emphasizes that for the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination, Israel must stop violating international law and Palestinian rights by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands [occupied since 1967] and dismantling the wall;
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting, and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties, as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

BDS is urgent because of the unjust conditions facing the Palestinian people and because the UN and the world's dominant imperialist powers, led by the United States, have not only failed to hold Israel accountable to its obligations under international law, but enabled it politically, diplomatically, militarily, and afforded it immunity, practically turning a blind eye to their atrocities and making it a state above the law of nations.

A call for an international BDS-like campaign was first made in 1960 against the apartheid regime in South Africa. By the mid-1980s, serious actions were being taken around the world crippling the South African economy. Given the effectiveness of the African campaign coupled with similar acts of discrimination against Palestinians, the BDS campaign has the potential to make significant strides in short time.

Not surprisingly, the movement to boycott, divest, and sanction Israel for its flagrant abuse of Palestinians, from house demolitions, settlement on their lands, and the outright murder of those who oppose them, has started to "bite". In addition to NGOs and civil society organizations, trade unions around world, especially in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and South Africa, have endorsed boycotting Israel to end its impunity. More and more unions and union federations in Canada have adopted resolutions and pursued actions supporting BDS. Churches, oftentimes reluctant to take a stand on controversial issues, have taken up the fight for BDS.

### Examples of BDS Victories:

- 2021 - Ben & Jerry's – the ice cream maker owned by Unilever – announced it would no longer sell its products in illegal Israeli settlement colonies, saying such sales were “inconsistent with its values.”
- 2016 – G4s, the world's largest security company, sold off its Israeli subsidiary after a 4-year long global campaign
- 2021 - Norway's largest pension fund KLP divested from 16 settlement profiteers, including banks, construction companies and telecommunications companies, because of “an unacceptable risk” that they will violate human rights.
- Hundreds of musicians, including Pink Floyd, Rage Against the Machine, Patti Smith, QuestLove and Stars, have signed onto the Musicians for Palestine initiative, refusing among other things to perform at Israel's complicit cultural institutions.
- In the Canadian labour movement, CUPE Ontario, CUPW, Unifor, the Canadian Labour Congress, PSAC, BCGEU, Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ) / Quebec House of Labour, and other labour organizations have passed resolutions in support of BDS

***“There's a very robust boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign all over the world that is capturing the political and moral imagination of the people, the NGO's and civil society and is beginning to have an important impact on Israel's way of acting and thinking.”***

Richard Falk *UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*

## What are Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions?

**BOYCOTTS** involve withdrawing support from Israel's apartheid regime, complicit Israeli sporting, cultural and academic institutions, and from all Israeli and international companies engaged in violations of Palestinian human rights.

**DIVESTMENT** campaigns urge banks, local councils, churches, pension funds and universities to withdraw investment from the State of Israel and all Israeli and international companies that sustain Israeli apartheid.

**SANCTIONS** campaigns pressure governments to fulfil their legal obligations to end Israeli apartheid, and not aid or assist its maintenance, by banning business with illegal Israeli settlements, ending military trade and free-trade agreements, as well as suspending Israeli's membership in international forums such as UN bodies and FIFA.

### FURTHER READING:

- *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* by Omar Barghouti