

The BDS Campaign

Background, Funding and Recommendations



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Background

- BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) campaigns are a major component of the political war against Israel. In this war, human rights principles and humanitarian frameworks are exploited in order to accuse Israel of “ethnic cleansing,” “war crimes,” and “apartheid.”
- BDS is not an organization or movement. It is a nonhierarchical network consisting of dozens of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and radical activists, who coordinate their activities at various levels. Their BDS campaigns are facilitated by tens of millions of dollars and euros, which they receive from governments, religious institutions, and private donors. These resources enable ostensibly “grassroots campaigns” by activists and enhance the influence of anti-Israel voices in academic settings, labor organizations, and religious institutions.
- BDS is the main component of the “Durban Strategy,” which was adopted by dozens of NGOs at the 2001 UN Conference against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, and crystallized the strategy of delegitimizing Israel as “an apartheid regime” through international isolation.
- Other tactics of the Durban Strategy, which drive BDS campaigns, include “[lawfare](#)” against Israeli officials in international and local courts; lobbying international bodies, including the UN, EU, US, and International Criminal Court; publishing distorted, misleading and false allegations of “war crimes,” “ethnic cleansing,” and “apartheid”; and organizing provocations such as flotillas and violent demonstrations under the guise of humanitarian aid and human rights.
- Under the façade of “legitimate criticism of Israel,” BDS masks the strong antisemitic characteristics of the movement. BDS [seeks](#) to end the “occupation and colonization of all Arab lands” and promotes a right of “Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties.” These goals undermine the fundamental right of the Jewish people to self-determination. In addition, [many Christian organizations that finance and promote these campaigns use antsemitic rhetoric and images](#).
- The claim that attempts to boycott Israel will end upon reaching a peace agreement based on two states is inconsistent with the aims of BDS campaigns and the statements of leading BDS activists.

Implications of BDS Campaigns

- To date, BDS campaigns have achieved little success in harming Israel’s economy. However, their effectiveness lies in the ability to push the BDS agenda into public and political discourse about Israel, while blurring the lines between criticism of Israeli policy and de-legitimization that aims to eliminate the concept of a Jewish State.
- Much of the damage caused by BDS is its influence on international perceptions of Israel: the threat of political, economic, academic and cultural isolation as a means of pressuring the Israeli public; introducing the concept of boycott into mainstream political discourse as a legitimate means of affecting Israeli policy and as a non-violent alternative to acts of terror; and using any issue (Jerusalem, Bedouins, Gaza, African migrants, etc.) as evidence of Israeli “racism.” **This approach leads governments and companies to adopt or surrender to BDS tactics, often without understanding the radical agenda behind the campaigns.**
- **NGO Monitor believes that the State of Israel has the ability to deal effectively with the BDS campaign. However, it should be done in a methodical, informed manner, using well-established facts. Many proponents of BDS are not aware of the true agenda that motivates this campaign. In addition, the influence of BDS should not be overstated.**

Main Modes of BDS Action

- **Economic Boycott** – Attacking companies and corporations in Israel and abroad, by distorting legal principles, and arguing that business ties with Israel allegedly aid and abet human rights violations. In many cases, these campaigns involve political NGOs and radical activists. Activities include improper legal proceedings and purchasing shares to promote divestment through annual shareholder meetings. One of the most common terms used by these organizations is corporate social responsibility (CSR), a set of norms and standards that incorporate business-economic considerations with environmental, ethical, and human rights concerns. In this context, a network of organizations and corporate social responsibility firms work to lobby firms and corporations to withdraw their investments from Israel. ([For further reading see the NGO Monitor report on this issue.](#))
- **Churches** – BDS activists [claim that](#) “Religious institutions are seen in many communities as embodying important moral and ethical principles.... Divestment campaigns that target companies have been initiated in a number of major Christian churches. Not only will successful divestment campaigns financially weaken the Occupation, but [they] will raise both the public profile and legitimacy of the BDS campaign.” BDS has become a central topic in mainline churches in the United States, Europe, Canada and other places. Several European governments, in addition to the United States and Canada, fund the efforts of the churches to demonize Israel. In some cases, taxpayer money is transferred to church humanitarian organizations, which in turn transfer funds to political NGOs, including Christian groups that publicly support the BDS campaign and a “one state” framework, and in many cases [spread theological antisemitism](#) among the major churches around the world. ([For further reading see the NGO Monitor report on this issue.](#))
- **Campuses and Academic boycotts** – A network of NGOs promotes BDS campaigns on campuses in North America and Europe, and provides funding, guidance, training, and legal assistance to campus boycott activists. With more than 150 chapters throughout the United States, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) is the organization most directly responsible for BDS on campus, and it frequently organizes pro-BDS events on campuses, including the annual “Apartheid Week.” Its status as an official student organization makes it eligible for university funding on several public campuses. These public funds are often used to finance events and host pro-BDS speakers such as Omar Barghouti, Ali Abunimah, Miko Peled, and Allison Weir. ([For further reading see the NGO Monitor report on this issue](#))
- **Promoting labeling, differentiation and the boycott of specific products** – Political NGOs, funded directly and indirectly by the EU and European governments, have been conducting a massive lobbying effort with the European Union to implement this measure as part of the BDS campaign. BDS NGOs and activists push product labeling from the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights as a first step toward more punitive measures that go far beyond settlement goods (including wholly legal commercial activity that could be linked, no matter how trivially, to settlements). Their ultimate goal is a [comprehensive boycott](#) of Israel regardless of its borders. ([For further reading see NGO Monitor report in that issue.](#))

Funding and Resources

- In order to understand how the BDS mechanism works, it is necessary to understand the funding sources utilized by the network of NGOs and activists, and the governments and other groups that provide most of the funding.
- Some of the leading BDS organizations receive extensive support from foreign governments and private foundations totaling hundreds of millions of dollars and euros. European governments, the EU, as well as Norway and Switzerland, provide an estimated **€100 million annually** to international, Israeli, and Palestinian NGOs that work to boycott Israel and its citizens.
- NGOs that operate in the conflict and receive government funding often have a one-sided political agenda. In return, these organizations provide donor governments with reports and analyses of issues related to human rights and international law, and reflecting their political biases. Through this financing, channeled directly and indirectly (through humanitarian and church based aid organizations), European governments enable BDS campaigns, which they officially oppose.
- The EU's and other governments' oversight, evaluation, and decision-making processes are confidential and non-transparent. There are no public hearings or debates in parliament, and all official requests for information under European Freedom of Information laws are rejected. In many cases, anti-Israel NGOs influence governmental policy-making processes ("outsourcing" of foreign policy), a procedure that is contrary to democratic accountability.

Recommendations

- **Stopping the funding** – The most effective strategy for dealing with anti-Israeli campaigns is to stop the massive funding provided to radical organizations that promote BDS worldwide. Therefore, an extensive dialogue should be conducted with European governments, aimed at creating agreed upon guidelines and independent evaluation mechanisms for the use of European taxpayer money.
- **Mapping and sharing information** – NGOs and extreme activists should be mapped in conjunction with government ministries, civil society organizations and experts on the subject. This information should be disseminated to representatives of Israel government offices around the world, local and global media, delegates of national institutions (Jewish Agency, Jewish National Fund), Jewish communities, and businesses under the threat of boycott.
- **Exposing activists and radical organizations** – Publicizing damning quotes of leading BDS activists, exposing their true agenda and biases.
- **Initiating a strategic response to BDS initiatives** – An immediate response to NGOs, companies or activists who adopt the BDS agenda, in order to expose to the public their funding and statements. At the same time, incentives need to be created for competitors of companies that acquiesce to boycott campaigns and decrease their business ties with Israel.
- **Taking the initiative during "periods of calm"** – BDS campaigns usually have periods of reduced activity, in which activists and NGO prepare and plan further action against Israeli companies and institutions. These quiet periods must be utilized for action against a "bank of targets," including companies, NGOs, and activists that support BDS campaigns. In this way, resources that were meant for preparation and coordination with other groups and activists, will be disrupted.

NGOs active in BDS (partial list)

Organization	Location	Main Donors	Activity
Israeli Organizations			
Who Profits	Israel (Registered)	Indirect: Netherlands, Ireland, Germany, Norway	Divestment and mapping companies
Grassroots Jerusalem	Israel (Registered)	Direct: EU, French consulate. Indirect: Finland, Denmark	Fostering cooperation between BDS groups
Sabeel	Israel (Registered)	Indirect: Netherland, Sweden	BDS in churches
Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHAD)	Israel (Closed by Registrar of Non-Profits), Finland, UK	No transparency (Previous funders: Spain, Ireland, EU)	BDS, including in churches
Zochrot	Israel (Registered)	Indirect (via Christian organizations): Finland, France, Germany, UK, Belgium, Switzerland	Promoting a “right of return”
Alternative Information Center	Israel (Registered)	Indirect: Sweden, France, EU, Netherland, Switzerland	BDS
Boycott from Within	Israel (not registered)	Unknown	Official BDS branch in Israel
Palestinian Organizations			
Badil	Ramallah	Direct: Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Switzerland. Indirect: Denmark, Ireland	Promoting a “right of return”
Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR)	Gaza	Direct: EU, UN, Ireland, Norway, Denmark. Indirect: UK, Sweden, Netherland, Denmark.	Lawfare
Al Haq	Ramallah	Direct: Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland. Indirect: (via humanitarian aid organizations): UK, Sweden, Germany, UN	Lawfare
Al Mezan	Gaza	Direct: Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, EU, UN. Indirect: Sweden, Germany, UK	Lawfare
Addameer	Ramallah	Direct: Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Switzerland.	Lawfare
Stop the Wall	Ramallah	Direct: Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Netherlands	BDS
International Organization			
International Solidarity Movement (ISM)	USA (acting in Israel and in the Territories)	Private funding, no transparency	Provocations against the IDF in the Territories
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)	USA (acting in Israel and in the Territories)	Indirect: Germany and private funding	BDS
Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)	Not registered, active in Israel	A project of the World Councils of Churches, funded by Norway, Denmark, Finland, UK, Netherlands, Germany (via church NGOs)	Provocations against the IDF in the Territories
FIDH: International Federation of Human Rights	France	Direct: EU, Finland, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden	Lawfare
Students for Justice in Palestine	USA	Private funding: American Muslims for Palestine, WESPAC, no transparency in additional donors	Campus BDS
Jewish Voice for Peace	USA	Private Funding: The Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, Firedoll Foundation, Wallace Global Fund, Violet Jabara Foundation	BDS
Electronic Intifada	USA	No transparency (in the past – Netherlands)	BDS
War on Want	UK	Direct: UK, Ireland	BDS
Norwegian Refugee Council	Norway	Direct: EU, Norway, UK	Lawfare

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NGO Monitor provides information and analysis, promotes accountability, and supports discussion on the reports and activities of NGOs claiming to advance human rights and humanitarian agendas.

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