

BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, AND SANCTIONS (BDS)

WHAT IS BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, AND SANCTIONS (“BDS”)

BDS is a call from Palestinian Civil Society that uses non-violent boycotts and divestment measures in an attempt to pressure the Israeli government to recognize Palestinians’ human rights, including their rights to full equality, freedom from violence and forced displacement, and their right to return.¹ The movement was inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, and urges action to pressure Israel to comply with international law.

The three stated objectives of BDS are:

1. Ending Israel's occupation and colonization of all Arab lands 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 now a global movement made up of unions, academic associations, churches, and grassroots movements across the world, including in Canada.

¹ BDS Movement, “Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS” (9 July 2005), online: <https://bdsmovement.net/call>.

BOYCOTTS: The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) calls for a boycott of Israeli and international companies that are complicit in violations of Palestinian rights. Virtually all Israeli companies are complicit to some degree in Israel’s system of occupation and apartheid. We focus our boycotts on a small number of companies and products for maximum impact. The BNC focuses on companies that play a clear and direct role in Israel’s crimes and where we think we can have an impact.

Israeli cultural and academic institutions directly contribute to maintaining, defending or whitewashing the oppression of Palestinians, as Israel deliberately tries to boost its image internationally through academic and cultural collaborations. As part of the boycott, academics, artists, and consumers are campaigning against such collaboration and “rebranding.” A growing number of artists have refused to exhibit or play in Israel.

DIVESTMENT means that a company or organization removes resources or investments and/or ensures that their investment portfolios and pension funds are not used to finance companies directly supporting or profiting from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. These efforts raise awareness about the reality of Israel’s policies and encourage companies to use their economic influence to pressure Israel to end its systematic denial of Palestinian rights.

SANCTIONS are an essential part of demonstrating disapproval for a country’s actions. Israel’s membership of various diplomatic and economic forums provides both an unmerited veneer of respectability and material support for its crimes. By calling for sanctions against Israel, campaigners educate society about violations of international law and seek to end the complicity of other nations in these violations.



IS IT ILLEGAL TO SUPPORT BDS?

- No. Boycotts, campaigns, and protests to draw attention to human rights violations are protected activity under the right to free speech, which is protected pursuant to s. 2(b) of the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

IS BDS ANTI-SEMITIC?

- No. BDS is focused on the human rights of the Palestinian people and Israel's compliance with international human rights standards under international law. It is not anti-Semitic nor anti-Israel to require the Israeli government to comply with such obligations.

WHAT COMPANIES SHOULD I BOYCOTT?

- For a detailed list of international companies that aid and abet Israel's violations of international law, including by operating in illegal Israeli settlements and acting as contractors for the Israeli military and government, check out the BDS Canada [Consumer Boycott Action List](#) from the Canadian BDS Coalition.

WHAT ARE SANCTIONS?

- 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 Israel's membership in international forums such as UN bodies.²
- Canadian sanctions laws implement United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions regimes under the *United Nations Act*³, as well as Canadian autonomous sanctions regimes under the *Special Economic Measures Act*.⁴
- Pursuant to the *Special Economic Measures Act*, sanctions may be ordered when gross and systematic human rights violations have been committed in a foreign state. In this regard, Canada's own domestic law could call for sanctions based on Israel's systemic human rights violations and violations against humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions. Check out more on the Al-Haq [Gaza20/20](#) campaign which in Canada references the *Special Economic Measures Act*.

² BDS Movement, "What are Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions?", online: <https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds>.

³ RSC 1985, c. U-2.4

⁴ SC 1992, c. 17.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES, VISIT THE FOLLOWING:

CANADIAN BDS COALITION

For analysis, information and statements about BDS in Canada visit the Canadian BDS Coalition website at bdscoalition.ca.

