

Jewish Delegate Assembly of Greater Pittsburgh Statement in Opposition to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement against Israel

Passed March 3, 2016

Cosponsors: Hillel Jewish University Center, Panthers for Israel, Community Relations Council

Background

Israel today faces an intensive and increasingly sophisticated global assault on its right to exist as a sovereign, democratic and Jewish state. This is largely accomplished through the well-funded campaign of delegitimization that utilizes Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), among other techniques, to brand Israel as a “pariah” nation and isolate it from the international community.

While the majority of delegitimization efforts are defeated and support for Israel in the U.S. remains strong, these efforts continue to make headway simply by poisoning public discourse about Israel. Key civil society constituencies, such as college campuses, academic associations, mainline Protestant churches, and socially responsible investing forums, among others, are repeatedly targeted.

Omar Barghouti, founder of the international BDS movement, has been quoted as saying:

“Definitely, most definitely we oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine. No Palestinian, rational Palestinian, not a sell-out Palestinian, will ever accept a Jewish state in Palestine.”

This is in direct contrast to what Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, told The Star, a South African newspaper, in Dec. 2013:

“No, we do not support the boycott of Israel.” He later added, *“We don’t ask anyone to boycott Israel itself. We have relations with Israel, we have mutual recognition with Israel.”*

Despite Abbas’ request, anti-Israel groups such as Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace continue to advocate for BDS on college campuses in Southwestern Pennsylvania, as well as on campuses and in communities throughout the country. Additionally, 10 academic associations, including the American Studies Association and the National Women’s Studies Association, have voted in favor of divestment from Israel, threatening the free exchange of ideas with Israeli institutions and contradicting the basic principles of academic freedom. Labor unions across the country are also beginning to vote on resolutions in support of BDS. Some mainline Protestant churches, including the Presbyterian Church, the United Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ, have approved boycotts of Israel at their respective national assemblies.

It is too simplistic to boycott Israel when both sides share responsibility for a complex conflict. BDS targets only Israel, and while there are problems on the Israeli side, the Palestinians are not blameless in this conflict. Their actions – including terrorism and indiscriminate rocket fire on civilians, refusing peace plans and failure to acknowledge the Jewish people's right to self-determination – have also led to the current situation.

The Jewish Delegates Assembly of Greater Pittsburgh:

- Reaffirms the Jewish people's right to self-determination and to a Jewish homeland in the State of Israel.
- Recognizes the divisive tactics of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement, which intends to end Israel's existence as a Jewish state.
- Expresses concern that there are some in favor of BDS who have limited information about the nature of the movement and do not fully understand the devastating consequences it would have on the international Jewish community if it is ultimately successful.
- Acknowledges the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and encourages direct bilateral peace negotiations.
- Rejects all comparisons between the present-day Israeli-Palestinian conflict and apartheid South Africa, which is actively promoted by the BDS movement.
- Recognizes the need for education about the BDS movement and positive, accurate and relevant information about Israel in the Greater Pittsburgh community.
- Supports the Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition in its efforts to combat the BDS movement through statewide resolutions and legislation.

The Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh should:

- Work to educate the Greater Pittsburgh community about the problematic nature of BDS. CRC, possibly through an Israel task force, should specifically focus on:
 - Professors, particularly those with ties to academic associations, university board members, and influential students on campus
 - Individuals with strong connections at mainline Protestant churches
 - Labor unions
 - Other individuals with strong connections to groups, organizations, institutions and communities that the BDS movement may target.
- Work to educate the Greater Pittsburgh Jewish community about how to speak effectively about BDS to Jewish and non-Jewish community members.
- Refrain from harsh, inflammatory language about BDS, which may alienate potential allies or groups on the fence about the movement.
- Identify parties engaging in or planning to engage in activities with the potential to promote BDS, and to make reasonable attempts to civilly discuss the possible consequences of their conduct.
- Recognize the plight of the Palestinians while demonstrating that the solution is through constructive engagement, investment and a negotiated solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not BDS.