

# Middle East Notes

## Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

### June 25, 2015

*Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.*

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The principal articles of this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS), its various meanings and interpretations, its effectiveness in promoting Palestinian national, social and economic rights and in ending the settlements and occupation. The possible effects of BDS are major concerns of the present Israeli government. This issue's articles -- written by Israeli Jews, U.S. Jews and Palestinians -- explore the nonviolent BDS movement and its effectiveness from various points of view. Some links and a book recommendation are included to provide additional information on the history, reality and some of the results of the on-going Israeli/Palestinian conflict. (Photo: Graffiti on the separation wall in Bethlehem.)



**Commentary:** *BDS has become the principal means being used by the Palestinian people and their Israeli, U.S. and international supporters to promote the political, economic and social rights, privileges and obligations of Palestinians living in Israel, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Policies of the Government of Israel are the focus of this nonviolent movement. Some specific foci are the occupation policies of the government, the settlements, Israeli companies producing products on the West Bank and international companies whose products are being used to facilitate the occupation of the West Bank and isolation of Gaza. This BDS movement is growing, especially in Europe. It is becoming especially effective in publicizing the repression and oppression of the Palestinian people.*

- Mitchell Plitnick writes in the Foundation for Middle East Peace Blog that Yair Lapid, Israel's former finance minister, told a hawkish "pro-Israel" gathering in New York that the leaders of the BDS movement are anti-Semites and their followers are "bleeding heart, so-called intellectuals."
- Iris Leal states in Ha'aretz that there clearly is a concerted boycott campaign against Israel, but if anything can be learned from the case of South Africa it's that one cannot expect boycotts alone to change the situation.
- James Zogby notes in the Huffington Post that the Israeli government response to the BDS movement has been predictable. Being incapable of engaging in any reasonable form of self-criticism or even self-reflection, Israeli leaders have, instead, turned their wrath on their accusers and their victims.
- In +972 Magazine, Rami Younis records a rare discussion with Omar Barghouti, one of the co-founders of BDS, about its goals, its recent successes, and increasingly frequent accusations that the boycott movement constitutes anti-Semitism.
- Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JFJFP) present a number of articles illustrating what they believe is a hysterical over-reaction to BDS.
- Other articles of interest

**Book recommendation:** [On Palestine, Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé, Haymarket Books, March 2015](#)

Operation Protective Edge, Israel's most recent assault on Gaza, left thousands of Palestinians dead and cleared the way for another Israeli land grab. The need to stand in solidarity with Palestinians has never been greater. Ilan Pappé and Noam Chomsky, two leading voices in the struggle to liberate Palestine, discuss the road ahead for Palestinians and how the international community can pressure Israel to end its human rights abuses against the people of Palestine.

### **1) Let's take a deep breath on BDS**

**Mitchell Plitnick, Foundation for Middle East Peace Blog, June 17, 2015**

Yair Lapid, Israel's former Finance Minister, told a hawkish "pro-Israel" gathering in New York that the leaders of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement (BDS) are anti-Semites and their followers are "bleeding heart, so-called intellectuals." ...

The hyperbole around the issue has never been greater either. All of it is transparently overblown to anyone who actually knows the various players in this game. The BDS movement is not made up, as Netanyahu's Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked stated, of radical Islamists, anti-Semites and naïve fellow travelers. ...

Israelis, and too many of its supporters, continue to bury their head in the sand about Israel's diminishing standing in the world. The blame is on Palestinian public relations, the reach of the BDS movement, global anti-Semitism, or their own failure to adequately explain their position to the world. The one thing it never is, according to the Netanyahu government and too many "pro-Israel" groups around the world is Israeli policy. ...

By avoiding moves to end its 48-year old occupation and exaggerating the BDS threat, Israel is actually proving that only substantive pressure will convince it to end the occupation. ...

The distinction that Netanyahu and his cohorts in AIPAC and in Congress are trying to blur must be sharpened instead. The settlements are not Israel. They are an immoral and illegal enterprise that should not be supported — through tax dollars, investment or purchases. From such a position, classifying corporations that are profiting from the occupation, especially American ones as "socially irresponsible" can be supported on a pro-Israel basis. From that position, groups can stand up for Israel and support Israelis who are working to end the occupation, and combat the discrimination against Arabs that has become so bitter in recent years. ...

### **2) It's Israelis, not BDS, who must end the occupation**

**Iris Leal, Ha'aretz, June 16, 2015**

... There clearly is a concerted boycott campaign against Israel, but if anything can be learned from the case of South Africa it's that one cannot expect boycotts alone to change the situation. ...

The refusal, on both sides of the aisle, to accept full responsibility for the occupation and its consequences is reflected in a denial of guilt by the public as a whole, as if the situation of the Palestinians is none of its business and not its responsibility to remedy. The world, people here say, always judges Israeli harshly. ...

And when everyone is to blame except for us, it's comforting to console ourselves with a feeling of victimhood that is stripped of historic and moral responsibility. The bad news is that the current state persists because nobody else will do our job for us.

### **3) BDS: A legitimate and moral response to Israeli policy**

**James Zogby, Huffington Post, June 13, 2015**

In recent years, several entities have implemented boycotts or are in the process of considering other punitive actions in an effort to force a change in Israeli behavior in the occupied territories. European governments are moving to require Israel to label products originating in West Bank settlements so as to distinguish them from exports from Israel. Some U.S. churches and pension funds have decided to divest from businesses that support the occupation and settlement enterprises. U.S. and U.K. student groups have been successful in winning votes calling on their institutions to support BDS. And some

professional academic groups and renowned scholars and performers have indicated that they will not cooperate with events supporting or hosted by Israeli institutions in the occupied lands. ...

... When confronted by: Israel's continued defiance of international law; its theft of Palestinian lands in order to construct Jewish-only settlements and roads; and its daily displays of brutality and humiliation of captive Palestinians -- the desire to disassociate from and refuse to support that behavior is the right thing to do. And when confronted by an international system that has neutered itself, refusing to act decisively to put the brakes on Israeli conduct in the occupied territories, then the response of the BDS movement becomes even more supportable. ...

This is nothing more than the perverse reaction of a spoiled child who insists that he not only win every game, but that he must be able to define the rules by which the game is played. And when everybody doesn't agree to his "rules," a name-calling tantrum follows, coupled with threats of retaliation. This is the spoiled child turned bully.

It's an old story. When the United Nations votes 143 to three in favor of a Palestinian position, Israel denounces the world body as a "collection of anti-Semites and third world dictators." The UN, Israel insists, is hopelessly biased and incapable of playing any fair role. Israel's supporters then turn to what is, in fact, the "hopelessly biased" U.S. Congress pressing it to pass one-sided anti-Palestinian or anti-UN legislation. And they do so with no sense of irony. ...

#### **4) [Interview: The man behind the BDS movement](#) Rami Younis, +972 Magazine, June 14, 2015**

*As the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement grows, its co-founder, Omar Barghouti, has become a target for Israeli demonization. +972's Rami Younis sits down with Barghouti for a rare discussion about BDS's goals, its recent successes, and increasingly frequent accusations that the boycott movement constitutes anti-Semitism.*

... The BDS movement was launched on July 9, 2005 when a broad alliance of more than 170 Palestinian political parties, trade unions, refugee networks, NGOs and grassroots associations published an open boycott call to international civil society organizations and people of conscience. It called to "impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era," Barghouti says. "Today, the global BDS movement is led by the largest coalition in Palestinian society, the BDS National Committee (BNC)."

BDS calls for: an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories since 1967, including dismantling the wall and colonies; an end to Israel's system of racial discrimination against its Palestinian citizens; and respecting the UN-sanctioned, fundamental right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes.

"These three basic rights correspond to the three main components of the Palestinian people: those in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; those in the 1948 territory who live under Israeli apartheid, and those in exile," Barghouti says. He insists that regardless of what shape the political solution to the conflict takes – it must be based on these principles. ...

***A common accusation against the international BDS campaign is that it feeds on anti-Semitism. What do you say to that?***

"BDS is a non-violent human rights movement that seeks freedom, justice and equality for the Palestinian people, based on international law and universal principles of human rights. As such, BDS has consistently and categorically rejected all forms of discrimination and racism, including anti-Semitism as well as dozens of racist laws in Israel.

“Our nonviolent struggle has never been against Jews or Israelis as Jews, but against an unjust regime that enslaves our people with occupation, apartheid and denial of the refugees’ UN-stipulated rights. We are proud of the disproportionately high number of Jewish activists in the BDS movement, especially in the U.S.

“Conflating time-honored, human-rights-based boycotts of Israel’s violations of international law with anti-Jewish racism is not only false, it is a racist attempt to put all Jews into one basket and to implicate them in Israel’s crimes against the Palestinians.

“Israel’s charge of racism against the BDS movement is akin to the Ku Klux Klan accusing Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks of racism! It is so blatantly propagandistic.” ...

## **5) Hysterical over-reaction (to BDS): A collection of articles recommended by Jews for Justice for Palestinians**

**a) BDS: A legitimate and moral response to Israeli policy, James Zogby, Huffington Post, June 13, 2015**  
(see above)

**b) BDS, the new enemy, Uri Avnery, Gush Shalom, June 13, 2015**

... Netanyahu saw with growing anxiety that the Iranian threat was losing its edge. The U.S., so it seems, is about to reach an agreement with Iran, which will prevent it from achieving the Bomb. Even Sheldon the Great cannot prevent the agreement. What to do?

Looking around, three letters popped up: BDS. They denote Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, a worldwide campaign to boycott Israel because of its 48 year-old subjugation of the Palestinian people. Ah, here we have a real threat, worse than the bomb. A second Holocaust is looming. Brave little Israel facing the entire evil, anti-Semitic world.

True, until now Israel has suffered no real damage. BDS is more about gestures than about real economic weapons. But who is counting? The legions of anti-Semites are on the march. Who will save us? Bibi the Great, of course! ...

Omar Barghouti, the leader of the BDS movement, is a postgraduate student at Tel Aviv University. He demands the free return of all Palestinian refugees, equality for Israel’s Palestinian citizens and, of course, an end to the occupation.

However, BDS is not a highly organized worldwide organization. It is more of a trade mark. Groups of students, artists and others spring up spontaneously and join the struggle for Palestinian liberation. Here and there, some real antisemites try to join. But for Netanyahu, they are all, all antisemites.

**c) Bibi boosts BDS – Israel’s opposition proves it is necessary, Ben White, MEMO, June 13, 2015**

*While Netanyahu’s policies are widely seen as boosting the global boycott campaign, it is Israel’s so-called moderate opposition that shows why BDS is necessary*

... The official peace process is designed to thwart, and act as a substitute for, international law and the Palestinian people’s rights; BDS is based on them. The politics of Herzog and Israel’s centrists, the (il)liberal Zionists, is focused on preserving the settler colonial status quo; BDS seeks its transformation. Thus while Bibi and Bennett hasten Israel’s pariah status, it is the politics of the opposition, the ideology of Rabin, Barak, and Herzog, that best illustrate the impossibility of change from within – without the pressure and accountability that comes with BDS.

**d) [This is why it's hard to boycott Israel](#), Karl Vick, Time, June 5, 2015**

... What's the truth? The boycott movement was actually started by Israelis — Zionist liberals who support Israel's existence on land it won in the 1948 war that gave birth to the country, but object to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory on the West Bank and Gaza Strip conquered in 1967. The liberals, however, wanted only to boycott goods produced by Israeli companies that operate on Jewish settlements atop Palestinian land—vast truck farms and small factories that profit from what critics call an essentially colonial arrangement. ...

And yet, none of this amounts to boycotting Israel the country. All these activists—liberal Israeli Jews and ardent Scandinavians alike—take careful aim at punishing companies only for doing business on the West Bank (Israel withdrew its settlements from Gaza in 2005). Other activists are not so restrained, however. They call for a broad boycott on all of Israel. And that's where the issue gets difficult, and where Israel actually adds to the difficulty of taking discerning action.

For the last ten years, the most prominent voice for boycotting Israel is a group called BDS—short for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. It was begun by a Palestinian in Ramallah, Omar Barghouti, who promotes a campaign of economic isolation and opprobrium against Israel inspired by the one mounted against apartheid South Africa. The group publicizes almost every pro-boycott development around the globe ...

**e) [Links to groups leading the boycott campaign](#)**

**Also from JFJFP: [Crying "antisemitism" is Israel's comfort blanket](#)**

**[BDS-mania takes over Israel — for a week](#), Michael Schaeffer Omer-Man, +972, June 5, 2015**

... The European Union in particular has been making regular warnings, spelling out the consequences for perpetuating the occupation. During the final throes of the latest peace process, EU officials in Brussels were telling Israeli diplomats and journalists alike that there would be "no more business as usual" should the peace process finally be allowed to die — if the occupation is not given an expiry date. Europe-based international companies have been receiving warnings from their home countries about doing business in or with Israeli settlements. (The European Union, like most of the world, considers settlements to be illegal under international law.) ...

But soon enough there will be another crisis, another sense of looming isolation and a new string of boycott successes. And once again, instead of acknowledging that the occupation is inviting disaster on Israel, Prime Minister Netanyahu and others will continue to deflect blame onto antisemitism. ...

**[Netanyahu derails debate on boycott, occupation](#), Mazal Mualem, translated by Ruti Sinai, Al Monitor/Israel Pulse, June 5, 2015**

*Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu views the boycott campaign against Israel through a prism of antisemitism and is avoiding public debate over the BDS movement's motives, namely the occupation.*

... Netanyahu continues to fight this phenomenon using the antisemitism narrative to prevent a substantive public debate in Israel on the reasons for the boycott. He is afraid that this debate could, heaven forbid, expose the correlation between the diplomatic tsunami and the fact that the world, even while supporting Israel, cannot accommodate the occupation, especially when the nation in question is a democratic one ruling another people, and even if these people are aggressive and receive Iranian money to carry out terrorist attacks.

**Other articles of interest:**

[Thousands protest Galilee church “arson,” Ahiya Raved, Ynetnews, June 21, 2015](#)

[Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin - Former Israeli ambassador criticizes Obama, June 19, 2015](#)

[Israel’s behaviour will bankrupt it over time, Jonathan Cook, The National, June 15, 2015](#)

[The fogs of war and history – The real Naqba, Uri Avnery, Gush Shalom, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, June 6, 2015](#)

[Only when the U.S. is allowed to criticize Israel can it be a true friend, Ha’aretz, June 10, 2015](#)

[The U.S. must stop enabling Israel, Alon Ben-Meir, Huffington Post, June 18, 2015](#)

[The rational response to Israel’s state terror: boycott, Amira Hass, Ha’aretz, June 9, 2015](#)

[Against “hasbara”: Explaining ourselves to death, Dahlia Scheindlin, +972, June 6, 2015](#)

[Children are not soldiers, Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, June 11, 2015](#)

[This huge settlement will “turn Palestinian villages into a prison,” Alex Levac and Gideon Levy, Ha’aretz, June 5, 2015](#)

[No indictment in killing of four Palestinian kids on Gaza beach, Michael Schaeffer Omer-Man, +972, June 12, 2015](#)

[Hundreds protest planned demolition of Bedouin village, Tamar Pileggi, Times of Israel, June 11, 2015](#)

[The Arab Bedouin of the Naqab myths and misconceptions, Dr. Thabet Abu Rass, Director, Adalah’s Naqab Office, June 2015 \(PDF file\)](#)

[Six lies they told me about the anti-Israel boycott, Ronen Bergman, Ynet News, June 10, 2015](#)

[How every Israeli profits from the occupation, Noam Sheizaf, +972, June 9, 2015](#)

[Smiles and F-35s do not change U.S. policy on settlements, Amir Oren, Ha’aretz, June 15, 2015](#)