

## Justice for Palestinians: A Boycott Could Help

The call of Palestinian civil society for a boycott of Israel is becoming widespread and effective around the world. Apologists for Israel seek to condemn it as unfair, counter-productive and even anti-Semitic. But Jewish Voice for Peace, the fastest growing association of Jewish Americans, endorses the Palestinian Boycott, and here, briefly, is why.

There are millions of Palestinians in the world. Before 1948, they lived in Palestine, a territory dominated by the Ottoman Empire for 400 years, and then by Great Britain after World War I, under a League of Nations mandate. Zionist settlers from Europe grew steadily during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the clearly stated intention to set up a Jewish state and “transfer the Arabs”. By 1947, Jewish settlers were only 35% of the population, owning 6% of the land. But the UN, dominated then by Western colonial powers, and despite its stated principle of self-determination for all peoples, voted for partition, with 56% of the land allocated to a Jewish state and nearly half the Palestinian population consigned to the Jewish state, where they would be a minority.

The Zionists eagerly accepted the UN partition plan, even though they still aimed to take over the whole territory. In the war that followed, the new State of Israel expanded its territory to 78% of historic Palestine, expelled 750,000 Palestinians, and destroyed 531 Palestinian villages. Most of the refugees ended up in what are today called the Occupied Territories or in neighboring countries; some were still in Israel. But all of them, and their families, are entitled under international law to return to their homes and to receive compensation for damages. This, Israel has never allowed.

In 1967, Israel launched a “Six Day War” against several Arab neighbors and took over the remaining 22% of Palestine – the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Under international law, Israel is an occupier, responsible to look after the needs of the population there, and to withdraw from the territory as soon as possible. Israel has failed to meet these responsibilities.

Meanwhile, a full 20% of Israel’s citizens are Palestinians, but the laws and institutions of Israel do not accord them equal rights and status with Jews, as numerous neutral legal authorities have documented.

Palestinians have never given up their hopes: to return to their homeland, to live under laws that safeguard equal rights for all people, and to end the oppressive and confiscatory regime of military occupation and siege in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. They have a legal right to resist occupation by force, but Palestinian leaders realize that their force is futile against Israeli power and only leads to more suffering.

In 2005, a Palestinian National Committee of over 170 social agencies, cultural groups, labor unions, political associations, religious and educational organizations produced their Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanction of Israel (BDS), for the purpose of pressuring Israel to 1) end the occupation, 2) recognize the right of return for refugees, and 3) extend equal rights to Jews and non-Jews. The Committee takes no position on whether there should be two states or one. It explicitly rejects violence as a means to reach its goals; and it calls on individuals, institutions and governments to join Palestinians in supporting BDS.

**Is BDS fair?** Boycotts have been used for centuries by groups that have no other effective means to achieve justice. Boycotts were used in the US civil rights movement, in the battle against Apartheid in South Africa, and in many labor struggles. Courts have recognized voluntary boycotts as a legitimate form of free expression. The Palestinian BDS targets the Israeli government and companies and institutions that are complicit with it.

**Is BDS effective?** In ten years it has made an impact on Israel’s trade relations with Europe. Israel and its apologists view it as a major threat to the status quo, especially as BDS becomes more effective in the US. Members of Congress are now feeling pressure from the Israel lobby to penalize BDS activity, which would be a violation of free expression.

**Is BDS anti-Semitic?** This desperate claim only makes sense to Zionists who think that the preferences of Israeli Zionists are the essence of what it means to be Jewish. We at Jewish Voice for Peace say that is nonsense. It is past time for Israel to embrace the ethical values of real Judaism and end its unjust treatment of Palestinians.

—by JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE NEW HAVEN 5/30/2015 Contact us at JVPNH.org

**JOIN THIS VIGIL FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE—EVERY SUNDAY 12-1 P.M.**

**BROADWAY, PARK & ELM STREETS:**

**RESIST THIS ENDLESS WAR!**

<https://newhavensundayvigil.wordpress.com/>