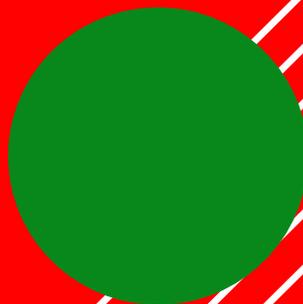


# PALESTINE & BDS PRIMER & FAQ

DSA BDS and Palestine Solidarity Working Group



# INTRO

This document is intended to guide individuals in navigating Palestine solidarity work. In the following pages, we provide a short primer on Israel, Palestine, and BDS, followed by recommendations on how to respond to some common bad faith questions, which are often cynically deployed to impede substantive conversation and deflect from Israel's decades-long oppression of the Palestinian people.

We end by listing actions to take.

If you have any further questions about this document or other general inquiries about Palestine and/or BDS, email us at [dsapalestinesolidarity@gmail.com](mailto:dsapalestinesolidarity@gmail.com).

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Primer on Palestine, Israel and BDS.....	3
Responses to Bad Faith Questions.....	6
Actions You Can Take.....	9
References.....	10

# PRIMER ON PALESTINE, ISRAEL, BDS

**Inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) is a Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice and equality.**

BDS aims to dismantle Israel's systemic oppression of the Palestinian people by boycotting and divesting from institutions that are complicit in Israeli apartheid and campaigning for sanctions against Israel until it complies with international law and meets *three* demands:

## **1. An end to the illegal occupation and colonization**

a. Israel's occupation and colonization (aka "settlement building") of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights since 1967 violates various UN Security Council resolutions (e.g. 242, 446, 452, 465, 471, 476, and 2334) as well as Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of an occupier's population to an occupied territory.

i. Israeli settlements are Jewish-only residential areas built in the occupied Palestinian territories in violation of international law.

ii. Since 1967 when the occupation of the Palestinian territories began, Israel has demolished approximately 50,000 Palestinian homes and other structures for an assortment of illegal and unethical reasons, leaving many families homeless.

b. Israel has established two separate and unequal legal systems in the occupied West Bank -- a civil system for Jewish settlers and a military system for Palestinians that is run by Israeli soldiers and officers. Often labeled as a "kangaroo court," Palestinians face a conviction rate of more than 99 percent and are frequently tried as adults at the age of 16. By contrast, Israeli civil law treats its own citizens as children until age 18.

c. Israel has also established separate roads, military checkpoints and permit systems for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, curbing Palestinians' freedom of movement and cutting Palestinians off from their families, jobs, farmland, and access to lifesaving medical treatment. This is all in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reinforces a system of apartheid.

## **2. Equal rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel**

a. In 2018, Israel passed the Nation-State Law, which defines Israel as the "nation-state of the Jewish people" solely, denying Palestinian citizens of Israel equal rights on a constitutional level.

b. Palestinian citizens of Israel are subject to dozens of other laws that directly or indirectly discriminate against them.

c. Systemic racism has resulted in inequalities between Arab and Jewish citizens that span all fields of public life and have persisted over time.

## **3. The right of return for Palestinian refugees as stipulated by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.**

a. Israel was formed in 1948 through the brutal displacement of approximately 750,000 Palestinians and the destruction of more than 530 Palestinian towns and villages, which were then either destroyed or turned over to Israeli Jews. This premeditated ethnic cleansing is known as al-Nakba, the catastrophe. During and after the 1967 war, Israel expelled another 300,000 Palestinians from the West Bank, roughly half of them already refugees from 1948.

b. Today, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, approximately 6.4 million Palestinians live in exile, and 1.5 million of them live in refugee camps. Over the course of generations, these camps have developed from tent cities to rows of concrete block houses to crammed, urban ghettos.

c. A majority of the 1.9 million Palestinians in Gaza are Palestinian refugees from 1948. Today, Gaza is often referred to as an “open air prison” due to a blockade imposed by Israel that restricts the borders, air space and coastal rights of Gazans, perpetuating an illegal occupation and creating a humanitarian crisis in which Palestinians in Gaza severely lack in basic necessities like medicine, electricity, and drinkable water.

d. Israel’s Law of Return, passed shortly after the state's creation, offers instant citizenship to any Jew living anywhere in the world. But, Israel denies the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UN resolutions.

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In solidarity with Palestinian civil society’s nonviolent struggle for equality, human rights and self-determination, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) adopted a resolution at its national convention in 2017 in support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

**As you will see throughout this document, your voice and actions are key to ending Israel’s ongoing ethnic cleansing and colonization of historic Palestine. More than an international issue, when individuals stand with the BDS movement, they also stand with anti-racism at home, the protection of Americans’ First Amendment rights, and divestment from apartheid for reinvestment in our communities.**

# RESPONSES TO BAD FAITH QUESTIONS

## 1. Isn't anti-Zionism antisemitic, or at least, doesn't it veer dangerously close to antisemitism?

- **Anti-Zionism is not antisemitic. Zionism is anti-Palestinian.**

- Zionism is a political ideology that aims to establish and maintain a Jewish ethnostate in Palestine. It is a racist, settler colonialist movement that sees Palestinians as a demographic problem impeding its main goal. Over the course of a century, Zionism has resulted in the ongoing systemic displacement and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people from their lands.
- All forms of racism must be opposed, including antisemitism, which has proliferated of late with the rise of white supremacy. But conflating antisemitism with anti-Zionism or criticism of Israel makes it harder to recognize and fight real hatred of Jews and detracts from the need to achieve safety through solidarity. For more, please read the Understanding Antisemitism report by Jews for Racial and Economic Justice.

- **Criticism of Israel is based on the government's actions, not on the Jewish identity of most Israeli citizens or leaders. In fact, there has been debate, criticism, and opposition to Zionism within Jewish thought for as long as it has existed.**

- Many Jewish leaders and thinkers in the late 19th century vehemently opposed Zionism, for various reasons. Today, the Palestine solidarity movement includes many Jewish people and organizations – some explicitly anti-Zionist – a testament to the fact that this is not a question of faith traditions or ethnic identity but of the belief that Palestinians have worth and rights as human beings and as a national group.
- **It is also noteworthy that ardent supporters of the state of Israel can still be overtly antisemitic.**
  - The largest pro-Israel group in the U.S. is Christians United For Israel (CUFI), whose founder, Reverend John C. Hagee, once said Hitler was part of God's plan to return Jews to Israel.
  - In December 2019, when President Trump signed an executive order censoring Palestinian rights activists, he was flanked by Pastor Robert Jeffries, a famous Christian Zionist, who has said that Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Mormons are all going to hell.
  - Richard Spencer, a prominent white nationalist, has publicly expressed great admiration for Israeli apartheid laws and sees the nation as a model for the kind of White ethnostate he wants to have in the United States.
  - The Israeli flag is frequently flown by white nationalists and antisemitic conspiracy theorists alongside other symbols of far-right ideology, even making a prominent appearance at the storming of the U.S. Capitol.

## **2. Do you believe Israel has a right to exist?**

- **I support Israelis' and Palestinians' rights to exist. The problem is that the state of Israel promotes only the rights of Jewish Israelis at the continued expense of Palestinians. I cannot in good conscience support the existence of apartheid.**

- Israel categorically discriminates against its non-Jewish citizens and rules over large populations that are denied almost all political rights, and subjected to thorough discrimination and cruel repression if they object. We should support the existence of a state where the individual and communal rights of the Jewish people can be protected and celebrated, but not at the expense of other communities.

### **3. Why are you singling out Israel? What about other countries that do bad things?**

- **I'm not singling out Israel. The U.S. government singles out Israel.**
  - The United States provides billions of dollars in military aid to Israel, in violation of U.S. laws that bar such aid to violators of human rights.
  - The United States has also provided Israel with special diplomatic cover for its countless violations of Palestinian human rights and international law, greatly enabling Israel's illegal occupation and apartheid policies.
  - As conscientious Americans, it's our responsibility to speak out against injustice, especially when our country is complicit.
- **Those advocating for boycotts, divestment and sanctions are responding to a direct call for nonviolent action that has come from Palestinians, who need civil society's help in ending Israeli dispossession, occupation and discrimination against them.**
  - Pursuing such goals in the context of Israel/Palestine does not stand in the way of seeking justice in other contexts.

*For further reading on how to respond specifically to critics of the BDS movement, read [Engaging Critics of BDS resource by the Quaker Palestine Israel Network.](#)*

# ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

1. **Support the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.** Learn more on what to boycott here: [bdsmovement.net/get-involved/what-to-boycott](https://bdsmovement.net/get-involved/what-to-boycott)
2. **Do not travel to Israel** with support from any Israeli governmental agency or affiliated organization, or U.S. entity engaged in promoting support for Israel, including universities.
3. **Advocate for ending U.S financial and military aid to Israel.** Call your Congressperson and Senator to condemn illegal settlements built in the occupied Palestinian territories, the demolition of Palestinian homes, Israeli bombings, shootings and detentions of Palestinians, and illegal blockade of Gaza.
4. **Oppose the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism.**
5. **Learn more about Palestine and BDS.** You can visit our Resource Library here: [palestine.dsausa.org/resource-library-new](https://palestine.dsausa.org/resource-library-new)
6. **Join our DSA BDS & Palestine Solidarity Working Group** to get directly involved in organizing: [palestine.dsausa.org/join-us](https://palestine.dsausa.org/join-us)

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